

## Core Knowledge Content

### What is Mental Health?

Mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders, it can also be greatly impacted by a range of socioeconomic, biological and environmental factors. As society becomes more aware of mental health and well-being, it is important to continue informing and educating the community through mental health promotion. Mental health awareness and education has a significant role in addressing the stigma that is associated with mental health, particularly mental illnesses, addictions, and disorders. Teachers play an important role in educating and continuing the conversation surrounding mental health and well-being within the school community. When there is a positive emphasis placed on mental health in the classroom, students will feel supported, welcomed, and comfortable.

The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Government of Canada, 2008).

According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2021), [1 in 5 Canadians](#) will personally experience a mental health or addiction problem or illness. For elementary students, specifically [Canadian youth](#), approximately 20% are affected by a mental illness or disorder (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021). Sadly, it is estimated that 1.2 million children and youth in Canada are affected by mental illness (Youth Mental Health Canada, 2021).

By educating students about mental wellness and teaching them to apply skills when dealing with challenging events, students will learn to understand their overall health and well-being, positive mental health, and the ability to build resilience (Ontario, 2019).

### Mental Health vs. Mental Illness

**Mental Health:** According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, positive mental health is “the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice,

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interconnections and personal dignity” (MOE - Health and Physical Education, 2019, p. 309).

**Mental Illness:** According to the Government of Canada, a range of illnesses that “are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning”. A mental illness is clinically diagnosed. Examples of specific mental illnesses include anxiety disorders; mood disorders, such as depression; personality disorders; and schizophrenia (MOE - Health and Physical Education, 2019, p. 309).

**Mental Health Promotion:** Mental health promotion “involves actions that improve a person’s psychological well-being. This may involve creating an environment that supports mental health” (WHO, 2018). In an educational setting, this could include, but is not limited to, support to children through programs, early childhood interventions, such as adapting one’s environment that is sensitive to the children’s health and emotional needs, mental health promotional activities in schools, and is this ‘and’ supposed to be here (WHO, 2018).

**Mental Health Literacy:** Mental health literacy encompasses the knowledge, beliefs and abilities that enable the recognition, management or prevention of mental health problems with a range of benefits including early recognition and intervention, and reduction of stigma associated with mental illness (UBC, 2018).

## Health Equity in Mental Health

Growing up, an individual’s health may be affected by internal or external factors, which have a significant influence on their experiences throughout life. These factors are known as the social determinants of health (SDOH) and can include income, education, social environments, physical environments, gender, culture, as well as many others.

These SDOH play an important role in mental health promotion within a school. As noted by the World Health Organization (2018), an environment that is respectful of a person’s “basic civil, political, socio-economic and cultural rights is fundamental to the mental health” of those involved. When teaching mental health literacy, teachers must create a classroom environment that is supportive and encouraging of mental health and well-being.

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It is important to note that the impact of these determinants can lead to health inequities across populations. Likewise, they may greatly impact an entire community rather than only a general population, which may cause poor health, especially one's mental health. Everyone can experience some sort of challenge regarding mental health, whether directly or indirectly affected.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's [2019 Health Equity Guideline](#) Social Determinants of Health:

- Access to health services
- Culture, race, and ethnicity
- Disability
- Early childhood development
- Education, literacy, and skills
- Employment, job security, and working conditions
- Food insecurity
- Gender identity and expression
- Housing
- Income and income distribution
- Indigenous status
- Personal health practices and **resiliency**
- Physical environments
- Sexual orientation and attraction
- Social inclusion/exclusion
- Social support networks

## Mental Health Stigmatization

The lives of people with mental health conditions are often plagued by stigma as well as discrimination. [Stigma is a negative stereotype](#) and is a reality for many people with a mental illness. Individuals report that how others judge them is one of their greatest barriers to a complete and satisfying life.

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Teachers should be aware of the attitudes and actions that encourages the stigma around mental health. The [Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario](#) (2021) created the acronym **STOP** to use when students may be speaking negatively about mental health.

- Stereotypes people with mental health conditions
- Trivializes or belittles people with mental health conditions and/or the condition itself
- Offends people with mental health conditions by insulting them
- Patronizes people with mental health conditions by treating them as if they were not as good as other people

Stigma can involve conversations regarding mental illness, addictions and disorders, or people seeking help when they need it. [Bell Let's Talk](#) (2021) identifies five ways to help amplify positive mental health awareness within your classrooms.

1. Language Matters
2. Become Educated
3. Be Kind
4. Listen and Ask
5. Talk About It

## Language to Start the Conversations

For many years, the language surrounding mental health and addiction, mental illnesses and disorders, as well as suicide and suicidal thoughts have been extremely stigmatizing. While teaching the subject of mental health literacy, it is important to use the appropriate terminology and person-first language.

Refer to the following list below for a list of the commonly outdated terms used and the preferred person-first language:

### Commonly Outdated Terms (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021)

Common/Outdated Terms	Person-first Language
Mental health <i>disorders</i>	Mental health <i>issues, conditions or illnesses</i>
Individuals <i>struggling/suffering from</i>	Individuals <i>living with</i> mental illnesses, etc.
<i>Mentally ill</i> person	Someone who <i>has</i> a mental illness

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Common/Outdated Terms	Person-first Language
Someone who <i>is</i> bipolar	Someone who <i>is living with</i> bipolar disorder
Addict/Substance abuser	They <i>have a</i> substance use condition
<i>Committed suicided</i>	<i>Died by</i> suicide
<i>Successful/Unsuccessful</i> suicide	<i>Attempted</i> suicide

When discussing mental health, the correct language is important and needs to be addressed. Language is only one small step towards helping end the stigma, there are still additional ways to be proactive for the topic of mental health.

Educators are creating ways to implement mental health into the classroom every day, without always labelling it as mental health. This can be accomplished through the integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. For more information on how to do so, refer to the social-emotional learning supplementary resources available in the Niagara Region Public Health mental health teaching toolkit.

Another way to promote mental health is by recognizing and celebrating health promotion days throughout the year. Listed are the specific days, weeks, and months dedicated to mental health (please note that there are specific days that change yearly):

- January - Bell Let's Talk Day
- May - Mental Health Week
- May - World Schizophrenia and Psychosis Day
- June - Canadian Men's Health Month
- June - Action Anxiety Day
- June 27 - PTSD Awareness Day
- September 10 - World Suicide Prevention Day
- October – Mental Illness Awareness Week
- October 10 - World Mental Health Day

### Notice and Identify (School Mental Health Ontario)

[School Mental Health Ontario \(2021\)](#) has developed a short heuristic to help support students – “**ONE CALL**”.

- **Observe** – Know your students’ typical behaviour and responses
- **Notice** – Notice changes in behaviour or mood of the student
- **Explore** – Seek out information about the things you are observing – you can use the resources on our site to help. Remind yourself of your school’s [circle of the support process](#).
- **Connect** – Consider connecting to others in the circle of support depending on the nature and severity of your concern. Follow your school and board protocols and pathways.
- **Ask** – Make a connection with the student to see if they are open to a conversation. Ask the student how you can help
- **Listen** – Actively listen and validate the student’s experience
- **Link** – Link students to other supports in the school where appropriate

### Healthy Choices to Support Mental Health

#### Self-Care:

- Eat, sleep, hydrate, move ([School Mental Health Ontario, 2021](#))
- Mindfulness
- [Take Care of Your Mental Health Too! - Ottawa Public Health](#)

*Refer to the grade-appropriate resources and activities that can be found in the mental health teaching toolkit.*

### Seeking Help/Support

As mental health continues to take precedence throughout our communities, students should be aware of the support that is available to them if they need support, if a peer requires help, or a crisis occurs.

Based out of the Niagara Region, there are many mental health services available for youth. Within the school community, if students require mental health assistance, they can reach out to the following people:

- School Health Nurse
- School Social Worker
- Counsellors
- Teachers/School Staff
- Parents/Guardians
- Trusted Peer/Friend

As an educator, you could suggest the following community resources that provide options for counselling, support services, and crisis lines:

- [Niagara Region Mental Health and Well-Being Resources for Adults](#)
- [Youth Mental Health Services – Niagara Region Mental Health](#)
- [Community Support - Mental Health & Well Being \(dsbn.org\)](#)
- [Mental Health Resources-Students - Niagara Catholic District School Board](#)
- [Programs and Services Archive - CMHA Niagara](#)
- [Mental health services for children and youth | Ontario.ca](#)

Below are additional resources that are available when students are looking for online support:

Access Line Niagara is a resource that can be used to help find information for mental health support. It is a free service for Niagara residents, note that it is not a crisis line  
[Access Line Niagara](#)

**Jack.org** has published a hub of resources that are available online. The goal of these resources are to assist individuals, specifically, students, in taking care of themselves and looking out for people during challenging times. Young leaders of this charity have collaborated with *School Mental Health Ontario* and *Kids Help Phone* to develop and

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provide easily accessible tools, support and reliable information for those who may be feeling stressed. For more information visit: [Jack.org - COVID-19 Hub](#).

Another fantastic resource is **Kids Help Phone**. There is an option to chat online with other young people (i.e., Peer-to-Peer Community), youth can learn about mental health, they can build their skills through online quizzes, games, and activities, and most importantly, there are options for further mental health support. There is a tab for immediate crisis support (text or messaging), a call or chat function to work with a counsellor, or a tool to search for programs near them. Overall, this resource provides services that are available 24/7. For more information visit: [Get Support - Kids Help Phone](#).

A recent initiative that is held every year at the end of January is the **Bell Let's Talk** Event. This day was established to promote mental health and help end the stigma for people living with mental health problems. Not only does Bell hold this event every year, on the website, they have additional information available, such as organizations and resources that support the mental health and well-being of young people. For more information visit: [Get help | Bell Let's Talk](#).

## Resources

Bell Let's Talk (2021). Get Help and Ways to Help. <https://letstalk.bell.ca/en/get-help#for-children-and-youth> and <https://letstalk.bell.ca/en/ways-to-help>

Canadian Mental Health Association (2021, August 13). Fast Facts about Mental Health and Mental Illness. <https://cmha.ca/brochure/fast-facts-about-mental-illness/>

Canadian Mental Health Association (2021). Stigma and Discrimination. <https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/stigma-and-discrimination/>

Canadian Mental Health Association (2021). Social Determinants of Health. <https://ontario.cmha.ca/provincial-policy/social-determinants/>

Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (2021). Mental Illness and Addiction: Facts and Statistics. <https://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/the-crisis-is-real/mental-health-statistics>

Early Psychosis Intervention Ontario Network. [EPION - Early Psychosis Intervention Ontario Network \(help4psychosis.ca\)](#)

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Government of Canada (2021, August 30). Calendar of health promotion days. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/calendar-health-promotion-days.html>

Government of Canada (2008, September 12). What is health? <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/population-health-approach/what-is-health.html>

Jack.org (2021). COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resources Hub. <https://jack.org/covid>

Kids Help Phone (2021, September 3). Get Support. <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

Ministry of Education (MOE) (2019). The Ontario Curriculum: Health and Physical Education, Grades 1 to 8.

Ontario (2019, August 21). Health and Physical Education in Grades 1-8. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/health-and-physical-education-grades-1-8>

Ottawa Public Health (n.d.). Resources. <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/mental-health-resources.aspx>

School Mental Health Ontario (2021). Notice and Identify. <https://smho-smsso.ca/educators/take-action/notice-and-identify/>

School Mental Health Ontario (2021). Think In Tiers and Focus on the Positive. <https://smho-smsso.ca/school-and-system-leaders/learn-more/mental-health-leadership-strategies/think-in-tiers-and-focus-on-the-positive/>

University of British Columbia (UBC) (2018, November 26). Mental Health Literacy. <https://educ.ubc.ca/faculty-units/office-of-the-dean/initiatives/mental-health-literacy/more-information/>

World Health Organization (WHO) (2018, March 30). Mental health: strengthening our response. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

Youth Mental Health Canada (2020, September 28). Youth Mental Health Stats in Canada. <https://ymhc.ngo/resources/ymh-stats/>