

Mental Health and Addictions Curriculum

1. All educators benefit from having an understanding of mental health and addictions

- The Public Health Agency of Canada describes Positive Mental Health as “the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and 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, interconnections and personal dignity.”
- “Good mental health is a resource for living. It enhances physical health and helps people succeed in school, at work and in their relationships and to contribute to our communities.” Open Minds, Healthy Minds, Ontario’s Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, 2011, p. 10
- “Mental health and emotional well-being involve the healthy balance of all aspects of life – physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual. A person with good mental health is able to think, feel, act, and interact in a way that permits him or her to enjoy life while being able to cope with the challenges that arise. Mental health is connected to how we think about and appraise ourselves, our lives, and the people we know and care about. It involves our ability to make realistic sense of the world around us and to react meaningfully to it.” The Ontario Curriculum, Health and Physical Education, Grades 1-8, Interim Edition, 2010 (revised), p.33
- Mental health is fundamental to student learning, achievement and well-being
- Many forms of serious mental health issues begin during childhood and adolescence, and most children and youth (75%) do not receive the specialized treatment they need
- Unaddressed mental health issues can lead to poor academic achievement and dropping out of school, unemployment, poverty and homelessness, and increase the risk of criminal behaviour
- Early identification and intervention leads to better health outcomes, improved school attendance and achievement, contributions to society and the workforce, and cost-savings to the healthcare, justice and social service systems
- Educators play an important role in supporting student mental health through creating healthy classrooms that are engaging, caring environments
- It is **NOT** however the role or responsibility of educators to diagnose and/or treat student mental health and addictions issues
- Students in Grades 7 and 8 may be vulnerable as they begin to transition to secondary school

2. There are explicit opportunities to learn about mental health and addictions across the curriculum

- The interim elementary Health and Physical Education curriculum reflects an integration of mental health across the curriculum.
- In the Health and Physical Education curriculum, Grades 11-12 (2000), mental health is included as a component of the Healthy Living strand.
- Issues connected to mental health are addressed in Social Sciences and Humanities courses such as Grade 9 or 10 Individual and Family Living; Grade 11 Parenting; Grade 12 Issues in Human Growth and Development; and Grade 12 Parenting and Human Development.
- Issues connected to mental health are also addressed in Technological Education courses, such as Grade 10 or 11 Health Care; Grade 12 Child Development and Gerontology; and Grade 12 Health Care: Support Services.
- Draft revised curricula (pending finalization of the elementary Health and Physical Education curriculum and release of the revised secondary Health and Physical Education and Social

Sciences and Humanities curricula) reflect a significantly stronger focus on mental health in response to research and stakeholder feedback as part of the curriculum review process.

- In the revised Health and Physical Education curriculum, Grades 1-12, the concept of mental health has been integrated across the curriculum. The focus is on mental health and emotional well-being versus mental illness, although an understanding of mental illness from the perspective of care for others and reducing stigma is included. Substance use, misuse, addictions and related behaviours including gambling are also included.
 - Throughout the ongoing curriculum review process, opportunities to learn about mental health will continue to be highlighted and strengthened within curriculum documents by highlighting mental health through examples, teacher prompts and sample issues, where appropriate.
- 3. Highlight opportunities to learn about mental health and addictions across the curriculum in a range of subjects/courses**
- There are opportunities to learn about mental health and addictions across the curriculum in a range of programs, subjects and courses, such as:
 - Developing self-regulation in FDK;
 - Learning about stereotypes and stigma through the Arts; and
 - Reading, writing and speaking about resiliency and mental health and addictions in Language, English and other languages.
- 4. Educators can support mental health and addictions in classrooms where it is not explicitly being taught, e.g., enhancing mental health and addictions when considering student groupings, instructional practices and interactions within the classroom**
- Students' learning in each subject is one component of their overall learning for healthy development and well-being. Physically, mentally and emotionally healthy students are more likely to achieve their academic potential.
 - While educators do not provide direct mental health and addictions services, educator awareness and responsiveness to the cognitive, emotional, social and physical development of students, including mental health and addictions, is critical for student learning, achievement and well-being.
 - By nurturing and supporting students' strengths and assets, educators can support all students by promoting positive mental health in the classroom.
 - At the same time, educators can help to identify students who need additional support and connect them with the appropriate services.
 - With a broader awareness of mental health and addictions, educators can plan instructional strategies that contribute to a caring, safe, inclusive and accepting classroom environment for learning in all subject areas, build awareness of mental health and addictions and reduce stigma associated with mental health and addiction issues. Planning instructional approaches while considering student resilience and overall well-being, including mental health and addictions, establishes a powerful foundation for learning.
- 5. Raising awareness of available resources, provincially and locally, and Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addiction Strategy overall**
- *Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addiction Strategy*
 - *Supporting Minds: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Students' Mental Health and Wellbeing* (in development)
 - School Mental Health ASSIST resources: <http://smh-assist.ca/>
 - Mental Health Leaders in thirty selected school boards (to be expanded to 42 remaining school boards in 2013-14)
 - Local resources/contacts