

Promoting Mental Wellness in a School Setting

DEFINITIONS:

- **Mental wellness** (positive mental health) is “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.” (Public Health Agency of Canada)

CONTEXT:

- 70% of mental health problems in Canadian adults have their onset in childhood and adolescence
- Approximately [one in eight students](#) in BC experience at least one mental health disorder at any given time
 - Only one third of these students receives the treatment they need
- Most students in BC (73%) rate their mental health as good or excellent. However, an increasing proportion of students rate it as fair or poor ([2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey](#)).
- The school setting is a great environment for universal mental wellness promotion

KEY MESSAGES:

- Promoting mental wellness among children and youth can reduce the prevalence of mental illness in adulthood
- Mental wellness promotion is most effective when it is implemented class-wide and involves the whole school over more than one year
- [School connectedness](#) is an important determinant of student mental wellness
- Social and emotional skill development (e.g. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness) is a key contributor to positive mental wellness
- Physical activity, healthy eating, adequate sleep, supporting individual resilience, and creating supportive environments can foster the development of mental wellness
- Research indicates that mental wellness promotion in schools can:
 - ✓ Enhance regulation of emotions
 - ✓ Enhance coping and problem solving skills
 - ✓ Increase engagement, academic achievement and attendance
 - ✓ Enhance empathy and respect for diversity
 - ✓ Decrease bullying and aggression

Ideas to Consider in Promoting Mental Wellness at School using a Comprehensive School Health Approach*

*Ideas adapted from Fraser Health's 'Mental Wellness Evidence Informed Strategies for Schools'

School Policies

- Wellness and mental health policies or procedures
- Social emotional learning policies or procedures
- Physical activity opportunities throughout the school day / daily PE policy / sports teams / intramural activities
- [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity \(SOGI\)](#)-inclusive policies and procedures
- Code of conduct (bullying prevention and intervention policies)
- [Alternatives to suspension/zero-tolerance policies](#)

Physical & Social Environments

- Welcoming, student-centred environments (e.g. sofas, lounges, plants, artwork, photos on display) and a 'wellness space'
- 'Mentality breaks' during class time (e.g. mindful breathing exercises)
- [Green schoolyards](#)
- Student leadership clubs that allow student to lead activities and events
- [2 x 10 discussions](#)
- Promoting [safe and caring school culture](#)
- Creating a positive work environment for all staff
- [Gay-straight alliances](#) / Gender sexuality alliances (GSA)

Community Partnerships

- Partnering with organizations that gather data on the mental health and wellness of children/youth (e.g. [UBC HELP](#), [McCreary](#))
- Partnering with community agencies that can provide:
 - Volunteering opportunities for students
 - Before/after-school programming (e.g. physical activity)
- School newsletters /blogs that promote community services and include [resources](#)
- Parent Advisory Council (PAC) led activities (e.g. [walking school bus](#))
- Family involvement in the school community e.g. coffee mornings, volunteer opportunities
- Parent workshops on supporting social and emotional development and well-being at home

Teaching & Learning

- [BC's New Curriculum](#) and Core Competencies, e.g. [Personal and Social](#)
 - [Mental health literacy](#)
- [Self-care resources](#) for teachers and staff, as the wellness of teachers and staff can affect the wellness of students
- Professional development opportunities for teachers and staff
- Mentorship opportunities for students to learn and practice social skills, stress management, healthy coping, etc.
- Education sessions that cover topics such as mindfulness, healthy relationships, anxiety and depression, physical activity, stress management, and sleeping behaviors
- Curriculum, training, and activities that appropriately respect indigenous culture and history, and acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing/being
 - [First Peoples Principles of Learning](#)
- Accommodating the learning and social needs of *all* students



VCH SUPPORT

- ✓ We can support these conversations with data, and presentations to parents or teachers if interested
- ✓ We can facilitate linkages with local community partners

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Foundry](#), [Anxiety Canada](#), [Kelty Mental Health](#), JCSH – [Positive Mental Health Toolkit](#), [Social & Emotional Learning Lower Mainland Network](#), [MindUp](#), [BounceBack](#), [CASEL](#), [MH Literacy Training](#) (gr. 7-12), [SEL Matters](#), [Kids Help Phone](#) (1-800-668-6868), [310 Mental Health Support](#) (310-6789), [TeenMentalHealth.org](#), VCH Physical Activity Action Guide, VCH Healthy Eating Action Guide