



Student Mental Health and Addictions Newsletter

February 2022

YRDSB Mental Health services are provided by YRDSB psychology and social work personnel

Getting through the “Winter Blues”

Dear families and caregivers,

In this month's edition of our Mental Health newsletter, we will focus on the “winter blues” and offer some suggestions of ways to maintain positive mental health during these cold months.

Cold hands and feet, wet socks, grey skies, and shorter days often go hand in hand with winter in Canada. The days seem long and short, all at the same time. Winter can mean many different things to each of us, such as moments filled with warm thoughts and cheer, snow figures, hot drinks, and winter festivities. It can also mean stuffy and runny noses and experiencing other forms of discomfort associated with the cold. While we all experience winter differently, most can agree that winter can be a difficult time of the year. Many individuals experience a shift/drop in mood as the temperature goes down. This is not unusual; in fact, there is a name for such an experience, “the winter blues.”



So, what are the winter blues?

[The Canadian Mental Health Association](#) describes the winter blues as “waves of low emotions that come with these cold, dark days.” The winter blues can be experienced as sadness or feeling down, having less energy and irritability. If you're experiencing the winter blues, you might feel the need to sleep longer, perhaps eat more comfort food, and spend more time on screens than with friends and family. To add to this, Covid-19 has added extra layers of uncertainty, stress, isolation and feelings of sadness for many

students, caregivers and families. Fond activities and ways of connecting, such as gathering with others, are limited and cautioned against leaving many without their usual coping mechanisms.

It is important to note that winter can be exceptionally challenging for many students and individuals who have migrated to Canada or are new to the country. The wave of low emotions can be paired with feelings of missing home and isolation (among other factors), worsening the experience of the winter blues. It is also important to note that students and individuals with special mobility requirements can be more adversely impacted by winter and the winter blues, as accessibility and navigating outdoor spaces can pose more significant challenges during the winter months. Additionally, students and persons with special needs or who experience forms of racism and forms of discrimination can also experience an extra layer of distress during this time of year as these experiences are coupled with the winter blues.

[Acknowledging](#) and validating the above experiences for ourselves, our child(ren), and those around us can be one small thing/action we can take that builds connection and warmth during these times.

The Canadian Mental Health Association invites us to consider the following ways to improve and maintain a positive mood and mental health during the winter months:

1. Let the light in

When indoors, spend as much time near a window and keep your curtains open. Even if it's cloudy, getting some daylight can help boost your mood. If possible, get outside during the day. Spending some time on a balcony is also a great way to get outside.

2. Movement

There is more than one way to incorporate physical activity, body breaks and movement in your day. Light stretches, dancing and other forms of movement can be an excellent substitute for the gym and traditional exercises. Physical activity is always a great tool to help support positive mental health. Starting small with even just a few minutes a day can help improve your mood and mental health.

3. Try to keep a regular sleep schedule

Keeping a regular sleep schedule is an excellent part of positive routines that support mental health, not to mention the benefits of sleep and rest. Support children in keeping a regular bedtime routine by setting and maintaining bedtimes and using alarm clocks for waking up when necessary.

Most importantly, be kind and gentle to yourself. Positive affirmations such as “I am doing my best”, “I am capable”, “I am committed to small steps” can be great ways to stay positive. If things feel beyond your control, help is accessible for students,

caregivers, families, and any individual seeking mental health support. Checking in with your family doctor is often a good place to start. Check out the resources below to learn about additional mental support:

- [YRDSB Mental Health Resource Page](#)
- [School Mental Health Ontario](#) has created a variety of resources for educators, parents and families, and students regarding supporting student mental health during this time.
- [SMHO Parents and Families Webpage](#)

Upcoming Workshops:

[Many Faces of Anxiety - Cantonese](#) and many more workshops at the [York Hills Centre for Children, Youth and Families website](#).

We look forward to creating pathways for caring connections and meaningful relationships with parents, caregivers, and families. Share your voice by using this [feedback form](#), and let's pave the path forward together.

Mental Health COVID-19 Page

COVID-19 has presented unprecedented issues and concerns for our community, our country and the world. As we focus on keeping ourselves healthy and containing the spread of COVID-19, we must also keep ourselves mentally well.

The link below is dedicated to supporting student mental health during this Pandemic. Resources for students, parents/guardians as well as community resources are listed. In addition, there are various links to YRDSB mental health support as well as community support. Please consider taking some time to familiarize yourself with the supports found on the [COVID-19 Mental Health Supports for Students and Families](#) webpage.

Continue to check out the [YRDSB website](#) for updated information as well as the Twitter account @YRDSB.

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