



## Student Mental Health and Addictions Newsletter

September 2021

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

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### **The ABCs of Mental Health**

Welcome back to our outstanding students, staff, families, and community members. We are thrilled to have you back and excited to share the first Mental Health Newsletter of the school year with you. Our September Newsletter will focus on sharing how the YRDSB is centering on Mental Health, emotional connections, and Well-being through the ABCs of Mental Health Framework & Lesson Series.

We recognize that many emotions may be associated with starting a new school year, especially as we continue to respond to the global pandemic that has brought many new experiences, changes, challenges, and learning for us all. In particular, we recognize that joy, excitement, worry, fear, and uncertainty may be common experiences for students, families, staff, and communities.

During this time, supporting a safe return and centering on [Mental Health](#) and wellbeing is vital. We know students thrive and are better able to succeed when they learn in an environment where they feel safe, heard, validated, and know they matter and belong. This contributes to overall positive mental health and is central to academic learning, one's ability to cope with change, daily stressors, and establish meaningful connections and relationships, among other things. To highlight this and intentionally create spaces where all students are affirmed, validated, and successful, the YRDSB has created the ABCs of Mental Health Framework and ABCs student lessons series.

### **What are the ABCs?**

[The ABC Framework](#) guides our collective efforts in supporting student and staff mental health and wellbeing. The Framework aids educators and leaders in laying a foundation where all can see themselves reflected and for learning environments in which caring relationships, trust, and healing are centred. We acknowledge that students and staff do not exist in isolation; and are part of families and communities. Thus, we endeavor to continue this work and learn from and learn with our staff, families, and communities.

The Framework includes Acknowledge, Bridge, and Connection:

**Acknowledge** feelings and life experiences over the pandemic (and prior) and how these affect our mental health as individuals and communities.

**Bridge** (or link to) to personal and community assets and strengths as a way to build mental health and wellness.

**Connection** with our community and with those around us who can help support mental health and wellbeing.

As part of these lessons, students engage in varied opportunities to:  
(learning opportunities and lesson delivery will be appropriate to the grade and developmental abilities of the student):

- Express themselves through connections to classmates, educators, and supports that affirm students' identity, feelings, interests, and abilities.
- Co-create affirming learning spaces with peers and educators that acknowledge experiences from the past and present-day, so all students know they matter and belong.
- Identify and acknowledge the positive experiences, strengths, and skills ALL students bring to the class and school community.
- Identify resources that they can access to support their mental health.
- Learn to notice the signs that they're not feeling well.
- Explore the things (strategies, people, places, activities, habits, family/community traditions) that make us feel healthier
- Taking steps to put those things in place and to ask for support when we need it

### **Why is centering on Mental Health in our schools important?**

Students are using their voices, and we are listening. Research by School Mental Health Ontario about what secondary students in Ontario said about their priorities regarding mental health indicates that 97% of respondents (students) want to learn more about mental health at school, including early warning signs of a mental health problem, ways to cope with their thoughts and emotions, how and where to ask for help.

Beyond this, we know children and youth thrive when their personal, social, and cultural strengths are affirmed and seen as assets in the classroom. When their identities are reflected and represented in positive ways in the learning. When connections and relationships are transformative. When they feel cared about, accepted, and applauded for who they are and what they can contribute to their environment. These considerations solidify the importance of the ABC Framework and lessons which seek to build capacity around these factors and ensure all students feel a sense of mattering and belonging.

There remains much work to be done and we invite you (families, community members, and staff) to work with us as we co-learn and co-create ways to support students and each other.

To learn more about the ABC Framework & lesson series please visit [YRDSB ABCs](#).

## **Mental Health COVID-19 Page**

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 supports as well as community supports available during the school closure. Please consider taking some time to familiarize yourself with the [Mental Health and Community Supports During COVID](#). Continue to check out the [YRDSB website](#) for updated information as well as the Twitter accounts @YRDSB and @YRDSB\_SS.

[No Problem Too Big or Small](#): This is a resource made by students for students. Throughout the resource, there are positive affirmations and reminders for students that there is help around and no problem is #TooBigOrTooSmall to reach out and ask for help. Download [Reaching Out](#) (designed for screen readers) or a print version [Reaching Out](#).

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