



Student Mental Health and Addictions Newsletter April 2021

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

Social Connection and the Power of a Listening Ear

A year later, we continue to experience uncertainty with lockdowns and social distancing; we long for social interaction with peers, friends, and families beyond our immediate social circles. This month's newsletter will focus on the importance of maintaining and expanding our social connections by offering a listening ear while following Public Health guidelines.

Restrictions limiting in-person interactions have left many parents and students feeling a sense of isolation, sadness, anxiousness, and frustration, among other feelings. The importance of offering a listening ear could not be more pronounced as many feel disconnected and alone. According to [CMHA](#), 'really listening' is the key to a meaningful connection. Active listening is a part of effective communication skills that can support building a real connection with other people. It can take some getting used to, especially when behind a mask and distanced six feet apart or even behind a virtual screen.

The importance of offering a listening ear to understand what a person might be experiencing is a small act that can make a meaningful difference. [Leon F. Seltzer Ph.D.](#) explains why feeling understood is essential to our wellbeing and how it connects us to others, allowing us to feel welcomed.

Included below are some tips to build connection safely by offering a [sympathetic ear](#):

- Reach out in a manner that feels safe and follows Public Health guidelines i.e., phone call, zoom, text, and other creative ways.
- Take the time to let the other person know you are there for them. *"I am here for you. I am listening. Tell me what's on your mind..."*
- Show empathy and understanding by validating what is being said. *"I hear you, and it makes sense why you would feel this way."*
- Acknowledge their feelings.

- Be present in the moment with the person.
- Listen to understand and take the necessary time to absorb the information.
- Ask questions when appropriate. The questions should be curious, open-ended, and ones that do not contain an answer. *"Can you tell me more about what that was like for you?"*
- Pay attention to body language by facing the person to show you are listening.
- Avoid advice-giving, interrupting, making assumptions, or judgments.
- Let the conversation flow.
- Be honest about how much time you can offer to connect.

Following these tips should help you get started on building meaningful connections through the act of listening.

[School Mental Health Ontario](#) has created various resources for educators, parents and families, and students regarding supporting student mental health by developing healthy relationship skills. Check out some more tips from School Mental Health Ontario on [reaching out](#), so you can be your best to support your children.

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 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 account @YRDSB

Patricia Marra-Stapleton, M.Sc., C. Psych. Assoc.

Mental Health Lead

patricia.marra-stapleton@yrdsb.ca

Hoshana Calliste, MSW, RSW

Assistant Coordinator of Mental Health

hoshana.calliste@yrdsb.ca