



Student Mental Health and Addictions Newsletter June 2021

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

Hope for the Future: Beyond Academic Loss

For students, June usually marks a period of celebration and closure. It is when proms, graduations, capstone projects, final performances, and independent studies are completed. Each of these events serves as a [rite of passage](#), the conclusion of one period before commencing the next year. As we continue to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic, we have experienced a shift to virtual format, postponement, or cancellation of many of these events, leaving many students and their families experiencing a sense of grief and loss.

According to the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#) (CAMH), grief is how we react to loss. Grief can affect our thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and how we function physically. Several types of loss are related to the pandemic, including but not limited to academic loss, loss of a loved one, loss of social connections, loss of rituals and routines. These losses can impact students' wellbeing and their sense of hope for the future. [Dr. Amy Cheung](#) youth psychiatrist at Sunnybrook, recommends that regardless of the type or size of an event, it is important to acknowledge the loss students might experience due to these events no longer coming to fruition because of the pandemic. Acknowledging the loss and validating the many thoughts and feelings students may be experiencing is vital. It is equally important to have conversations that are based on hope for the future. As difficult as this might be, given the uncertainty regarding how the pandemic will unfold.

The [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#) states, healing from the losses of COVID-19 is not just about accepting everything that has changed; rather it means finding healthy ways to address the losses we have experienced. Included below are some recommendations from [CAMH](#):

- **Name your struggles:** When we name/externalize the challenges we face; we can begin to clarify why we feel stressed. **Action:** Identify five things you have found challenging and order them from least to most difficult. **Example:** 1) Eating healthy 2) getting active 3) completing homework projects 4) finishing a task you

have been procrastinating 5) preparing for the move from elementary/secondary or secondary/post-secondary school. Select one issue to tackle first, break it down into smaller pieces to work on if necessary.

- **Taking things one day at a time:** The changes and loss that the pandemic brings can result in students and families feeling stressed, anxious, sad, and overwhelmed. Some may worry about when and if things will get better; this can affect mood and diminish an individual's sense of hope. **Action:** Focus on the things that are within your control. **Example:** Break down large tasks or projects into smaller manageable portions that can be undertaken each day.
- **Prioritizing self-care:** Self-care can look different for each individual and family. Prioritizing small and intentional actions throughout the day is essential to maintaining positive wellbeing. **Action:** Consider simple things you can incorporate into the day that add value and make you feel optimistic even in stressful situations. **Example:** Make an uplifting music playlist, incorporate YouTube wellness videos, listen to audiobooks, or read. If you cannot get outdoors, is it possible to sit by a window? It is important that the activity you choose fuels YOU!
- **Exercising and eating healthy:** Physical activity supports our physical and mental health, particularly when stressed. **Action:** Find an exercise routine that works for you, and select a balanced diet that provides the necessary nutrition to fuel your mind and body. **Example:** Beanbag or sock toss into a basket, light stretches or yoga, movement activities, and sports.
- **Talking to someone:** In previous newsletters, we addressed the importance of social connection and reaching out to talk to someone for support. **Action:** Let others know what you are experiencing. Learn how to identify when a child or youth might need help. **Example:** Ask for help from someone you trust. Utilize, supports from faith based or community organizations if additional help is required.

A Path Forward

We recognize that talking to a stranger or even someone you know may be difficult and uncomfortable. We encourage you to explore pathways of support that feel comfortable and safe to access. Consider supports such [Family Services York Region](#) which provides services in multiple languages included but not limited to Chinese, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and Gujarati. These services are free and confidential. Additional [community supports](#) and mental health activities which can be done at home with children can be found [here](#)

As we conclude this month's newsletter, we wish to highlight that a path forward and healing from the losses attributed to the pandemic is possible. We can shape this path forward and our own healing with small and intentional actions each day by focusing on what is within our control and seeking help when things are beyond our control. We encourage you to find ways to acknowledge and celebrate the "small things" and the "big things." Perhaps it is celebrating by baking a cake or creating a celebration meal. Maybe

you stage your very own graduation photoshoot or create a time capsule/memory box detailing the past year/years, which you can hide away or bury to open at a later date. Recognize that despite all that came your way over the 2020-2021 school year and the pandemic thus far, you pushed through, and you have everything within you to continue pushing through. Even on the days you may have felt otherwise.

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.

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