



## Student Mental Health and Addictions Newsletter

January 2024

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

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### New Beginnings and Exams

Dear Families,

After the winter break we are welcomed back to school and to a new beginning of the 2024 calendar year. We recognize that many of our students and families follow various acknowledgements of the calendar year, and that new beginnings are happening all the time. This provides us with many opportunities to begin anew.

When experiencing transitions, such as the beginning of a new year, we can become aware of parts of the transition that are joyful, and the parts that are challenging. We can help our children learn that it is OK for new things to feel uncomfortable and exciting, or to be curious and tentative about what the new year will bring. For some of our secondary students this new year will bring their first experiences with exams.

While some students may be entering their first exam season with a sense of confidence, some students may be feeling a mix of emotions such as: stressed, overwhelmed, or uncertain. How can we help our youth through this new chapter of their lives? One thing we can do is listen to our children when they talk to us about their emotions, including those related to exam stress. As we listen, we can also validate their emotions. While this may seem like a small act, it is hugely impactful because it makes youth feel heard, understood, and supported.

It might also be beneficial to remind youth of the times they have put their best efforts into taking a test, or times when they've taken a test and have been proud of



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their performance. In reminding them of these experiences, you might also encourage them to think about the strategies they used to study, prepare and feel confident for these tests. Everyone will have different strategies and that is OK. For some it might be studying while listening to music, or studying at a certain time of day. For others it might be preparing a study schedule, prayer and contemplation, eating healthy, or asking for additional academic help. No matter the strategy, it's helpful to encourage youth to remember what has worked well for them in the past. Finally, remind youth that exam results are not the sole definition of success. Even if they don't do as well as they would like to on their exam, encourage them to think about how they could continue to learn, grow and, ultimately, improve their understanding after the exam. This can help take some of the pressure off of taking exams. The Central Mental Health team met with Youth S.P.A.C.E. Student Leaders and a Student Trustee to talk about managing stress and mental health during exams. Listen to the Tune In YRDSB podcast episode to hear this important discussion: [Tune In YRDSB: Supporting Student Mental Health During Exams](#)

As we navigate the winter months, it is also essential to prioritise the well-being of our young learners. Some tips to ensure a healthy and happy winter season include outdoor play, healthy snacking, group reading and more.

### **Supportive Resources:**

[Mental Health Resources in York Region](#)

[YorkHills Here to Help Line](#) (905-503-9561)

The Here to Help Line is a free service available to children/youth (0-18 years) and their parents/caregiver/adult supporters. Monday to Thursday from 2:00pm-7:00p.m

[Family Services York Region](#) (905-895-2371)

Virtual walk in is operated on a first come, first serve basis, and can be accessed once per month. Virtual appointments can be 15 minutes to 1.5 hours long depending on your specific needs. Monday, Tuesday, Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

[CMHA BounceBack Ontario](#)

Feeling sad, irritable or stressed out sometimes? Do you feel that maybe you could benefit from some support? BounceBack® gives you access to materials and resources that will support you in learning new skills through workbooks, activities,



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videos, and a trained coach who can provide up to six telephone sessions. BounceBack Coaching is available through the provincial [Ontario Structured Psychotherapy](#) program. Offered to [youth aged 15-17](#) and [adults 18+](#).

### [YRDSB Mental Health Resource Page](#)

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

Follow YRDSB Mental Health on Twitter [@MH\\_YRDSB](#)

### **Students**

York Services Support Network

- [Wellness Recovery Action Plan \(WRAP\)](#)
  - January 10, 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm

### **Caregivers**

[York Hills Centre for Children, Youth and Families](#)

- January 15, 6:30- 8:30- [Teen Triple P Seminar #1- Responsible Teenagers](#)
- January 16, 6:30- 8:30- [Learning to Pay Attention](#)
- January 22, 6:30- 8:30- [Teen Triple P Seminar #2- Competent Teenagers](#)
- January 23, 6:30- 8:30- [Raising a Child with ASD](#)
- January 29, 6:30- 8:30- [Teen Triple P Seminar #3- Getting Teenagers Connected](#)

Family Services York Region

- [Free To Be](#)
  - Third Monday of Each Month, 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm
  - This is a free virtual group for parents/caregivers of gender diverse children, regardless of age which meets once a month. Free to Be offers an opportunity to meet for support and education. The goal of this program is to destigmatize gender diversity

York Services Support Network

- [Starting the Journey for Tweens and Teens](#)
  - January 10, 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
  - This group is for parents and family caregivers of children and teens ages 8-18, who have a recent diagnosis of autism. The group is facilitated by YSSN's Family Peer Mentors, who have felt all the feelings and are ready to listen and share, as well as a Foundational Family



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Service Worker, who will be on hand to answer your questions about funding and services.

- [Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workshop \(MBSR\) 8-Week Series](#)
  - [January 18, 25, 9:30 am - 12:00 pm](#)
  - Hosted by the DS Family Peer Mentor program and led by Dr. Mabel Hsin, you will learn tools for building resilience, increase wellbeing, manage stress, ADHD, improve focus, and numerous other benefits.
- [Transition Planning Resource Days](#)
  - [January 3, 19, 31 from 9:00- 5:00 p.m](#)
  - Need help understanding the developmental services system and transition planning? Does your child have an IEP? Book a free, 1 hour session, with a transitional planner to discuss and ask important questions.
  - Registration can be done through emailing [cmacdonald@yssn.ca](mailto:cmacdonald@yssn.ca) or calling: 905-953-8354 or 1-833-953-8354 ext. 2245.
- [An Overview of Sensory Processing and Strategies with Paula Aquilla](#)
  - Part 1: January 24, 6:30- 8:00, Part 2: January 31, 6:30- 8:00
  - Learn some of the more commonly-seen issues, how to identify when your child may be hypersensitive or hyposensitive, and strategies to support their sensory processing.
  - This workshop is for caregivers of children with autism ages 0-18.
- [Starting the Journey: Monthly Virtual Meetup For Parents and Family Caregivers](#)
  - [January 31, 11:00- 12:00 p.m.](#)
  - This is a group for parents and caregivers of children up to age 8 who are recently diagnosed with autism. The group is facilitated by YSSN's Family Peer Mentors and OAP-Funded Family Support Worker teams, who have felt all the feelings and are ready to listen and share. This judgement-free space is a chance to ask questions and connect with other families with young ones.

### PFlag

- [Coffee Night](#), held every second Monday of the month, is a safe space where members of the LGBTQ2 community, their friends, family or allies can come together.
- [Online Registration](#)

### [Peer Support Group for Parents and Caregivers](#)



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- This group is a support for parents and caregivers raising children and youth with mental health concerns
- 3rd Monday of each month
- Aurora Town Hall 6:30- 8pm
- January 15, 2024

This edition of the Newsletter was written by the Student Mental Health and Addictions Strategy Implementation Team 2022-2023, inclusive of YRDSB School Social Workers Ruth Damdar, Kymani Spence, Peter Reid and Kate Phillips.

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