TCDSB Celebrates Children’s Mental Health Awareness Week
First Week in May 2017
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Each year, Ontarians mark the first full week of May as **Children’s Mental Health Week**. This important week is about:

- **Increasing awareness** of the signs of child and youth mental health problems
- **Decreasing stigma**
- Understanding that help is available and it works!
- For more information on Children’s Mental Health Week please see [www.kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca)

1 in 5 Ontario children and youth has a mental health problem - That’s about 500,000 kids. Disorders range from anxiety, depression and conduct disorder to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, eating disorders, schizophrenia, and bi-polar disorder. Left untreated, mental health disorders can lead to school failure, family conflicts, drug abuse, violence, and even suicide. The good news is that help is available and treatment works!

TCDSB is pleased to share the enclosed **Children’s Mental Health Awareness Toolkit** with your school. The tool kit contains:

- Daily PA announcements
- Daily Classroom activities (elementary and secondary options are provided).
- Handout templates

There are 5 classroom activities that coincide which each day of the week. This year we have linked our daily activities to some of the health topics found in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum. Our 5 strategies and activities are:

- Be Mindful
- Reach Out
- Pray
- Exercise & Eat Healthy
- Get Enough Sleep

**We encourage Principals to share this toolkit with classroom teachers in support of Children’s Mental Health Awareness week.** The toolkit would be of particular interest to Health and Physical Education, Religion, Anthropology, Psychology, Special High Skills Major Teachers, as well as Stop the Stigma Staff Mentors! Feel free to share your school’s success on twitter

# TCDSBMHW2017

With sincere thanks,

*On behalf of the TCDSB Mental Health Steering Committee*

*Patricia Marra-Stapleton, M.SC.C. Psych. Assoc.*

*TCDSB, Mental Health Leader @PMarraStapleton*
TCDSB is pleased to share the enclosed *Children’s Mental Health Awareness Toolkit* with your school.

The tool kit contains:
- Daily PA announcements
- Daily classroom activities (elementary and secondary options are provided)
- Handout templates

There are 5 classroom activities that coincide with each day of the week. This year we have linked our daily activities to some of the health topics found in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum.

Our 5 activities are:
- **Be Mindful**
  - Monday, May 1, 2017
- **Reach out**
  - Tuesday, May 2, 2017
- **Pray**
  - Wednesday, May 3, 2017
- **Exercise & Eat Healthy**
  - Thursday, May 4, 2017
- **Get enough Sleep**
  - Friday, May 5, 2017

Each Daily Activity Includes:
- **An Introduction Message**, which is identical to the daily PA announcement that is intended for inclusion in your school’s Morning Announcements. You may wish to re-read the announcement as it explains the day’s theme.
- **Suggested Activity for Elementary or Secondary Classrooms**. There is a suggested activity for elementary and secondary teachers. The activity gives prompts, instructions, and includes list of materials, required handout templates (where applicable/required), and/or on-line resources or web-links.
- **Suggested Script for Elementary or Secondary Teachers**. The suggested script is provided to assist teachers in introducing the daily activity. This is a suggested script, but is optional, some will prefer to paraphrase. This is fine.

*Feel free to share your schools successes/pictures on twitter # TCDSBMHW2017!*
Be Mindful
Introduction/PA Announcement

“Mindfulness is a way of being and thinking. When we are mindful, we focus our attention on what is happening in our body, our mind and in our environment in the moment. With mindfulness, we live in the present, focus on what is happening right now. “Mindfulness ambassador council guidebook TCDSB”

Today, think about being present in the moment and being aware of your breathing. Being mindful helps us physically and emotionally & improves our mental well-being.

Suggested activity for elementary or secondary classroom:

Being Mindful of Everyday Activities. Being aware or “mindful” allows you to focus on the events of the moment, and on caring for yourself now, rather than dwelling on the past or anticipating what might happen in the future. As a student, your life and your mind are often so busy that you forget to take notice of the everyday occurrences that keep your senses ‘awake.’ Rather than allowing yourself to miss the moment, pause, take a breath and notice what you are experiencing. Your experiences may be pleasant and worth savoring. But even if they are unpleasant, you will be better able to cope if you face your experiences directly and strive to live “in the moment.”

How it works
Talk students through the following steps. While many experts recommend practicing this technique for 30 minutes a day to become comfortable with it, try devoting just five or ten minutes of class time to introducing the technique, and suggest that students continue to practice it on their own, gradually increasing the time spent.

▪ Find a comfortable position.
▪ While focusing on your breathing, allow your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations to flow over you, entering and leaving your awareness at their own pace. Recognize each sensation, but then let it fade away, allowing the next thought or feeling to enter your mind. Continue to acknowledge each sensation, then let it go.
▪ You will likely find that your mind is very busy with thoughts about all kinds of things – some pleasant, some unpleasant. Each time you notice that your mind has wandered, gently and without judgment shift your awareness back to your breath.
▪ Remember that the goal of mindfulness meditation is not to change your thoughts in any way, but simply to notice them and then, as best you can, continuously return to your breath.
▪ Keep it simple. Be patient and kind with yourself. Do not expect that you will be able to “empty” your mind of thoughts and enter a state of deep relaxation. The point of mindfulness meditation is to simply and compassionately begin to notice your thoughts, and then let them go.

The benefit
With practice, mindfulness and other meditative practices can allow you to develop clarity in your thoughts and feelings, decrease your negative thoughts, and promote a sense of peacefulness and centeredness.

(source: www.classroommentalhealth.org)
Reach Out
One in 5 people experience mental illness. We all have mental health. Learning how to build mental health will help us to build our overall health. TCDSB has many supports and resources available. In partnership with families, the community and our Catholic education system we are committed to supporting all our students. Relationships and belonging are important to our health. Did you know that at school you can get support from your teacher, principal, vice principal, guidance counsellor and CYW? As well, additional supports, such as our school social worker and our school psychology staff member who are available. There are many caring adults in our schools and community ready to help.

**Suggested activity for elementary or secondary classroom:**
Positive Affirmations are an excellent way to boost one’s self esteem. In addition, positive affirmations of one another can help build and nurture positive relationships by reaching out in a positive way.

Time Needed - 5 to 10 minutes

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**Tuesday, May 2, 2017**

**Introduction/PA Announcement**

Reach Out

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Learning Skills and Work Habits

Self-Regulation, Initiative

Keep in Mind
- An affirmation is a tool to promote confidence, self-regulation and resiliency.
- Encourage students to use this as a tool on a regular basis.
- You may choose to explain to students how thoughts are linked to emotions and behaviour: what you say to yourself influences how you feel which will impact how you act.

Instructions:
- Provide students an explanation of affirmations:
  An affirmation is a statement that makes you feel safe and confident.

Have students write or think of a four-word affirmation.

Example:
“*I can do this*”, “*I can do division*”, “*I try my best*”, “*I am loved today*”, “*I believe in me*”, “*Today will be awesome*”, “*I will worry less*”, “*I can handle this*”.

Practice putting this into action:
- Each word you have chosen will match a finger in your hand. As you say your affirmation in your head, match each finger with your thumb; one finger per word.

Let students know how they can use their Four Finger Affirmation:
- This can be used to help you feel more confident in stressful situations. No one will know when you are using your affirmation as this can be practiced privately.

Alternative Activity:

Instructions:
- Make Copies of the attached “Lunchtime Affirmations” for each student
- Encourage students to cut out the individual affirmations.
- Challenge students in your class, to share the suggested affirmations with their classmates by “hiding” the affirmation notes in clever spots over the lunch hour (e.g. in someone’s desk, near their coat, on top of their binder, or near their device...). The affirmations can be shared anonymously or students can sign their name on the back of the note.
Lunch Time Affirmations

I am an Amazing Artist
I am an Inspiring Writer

I am a Good Friend
I am a Math Rockstar

I am Kind and Thoughtful
I am Smart and Capable

I am an Insightful Reader
I am Strong Inside and Out

I am Courageous
I am Fun to be With

I am Brilliant Scientist
I am Loved
Pray
Introduction/PA Announcement

“God is a source of comfort, strength and love for us. Through prayer we enter into a deeper relationship with God and gain a sense of attachment to Him. Many studies have shown that individuals who pray to a loving and protecting God with whom they have a meaningful relationship are less likely to experience anxiety and stress. Prayer offers emotional comfort and reduces stress.” Praying helps to improve our mental well-being.

www.spiritualityhealth.com; www.psychcentral.com
www.psychologytoday.com;

Suggested activity for elementary classroom: A Letter to God
Prayer is a powerful connection to our Catholic faith as well as a significant protective factor in building resilience.

- Encourage the students to see prayer as yet another valuable tool in building their faith as well as their sense of well-being.
- Utilize the enclosed Handout #2 to encourage the students to write down what they would say to God. Encourage the students to take it home to use at a later time or simply have them destroy it, so that it remains private.

Suggested script for elementary teachers:
- Each day at school in our Catholic faith we start our day with traditional prayer.
- As God is always listening to us, think about just talking to God.
- Prayer can happen at any time during the day and when need, e.g. on the bus, walking to school, before a test, when you wake up or when you go to bed, when you’re anxious/stressed or feeling sad, or when we are giving thanks.
- Prayer can help us in supporting our faith as well as our sense of well-being. How do you feel after you “talk to” or pray to God?

Suggested activity for secondary classroom: Group Discussion about the Benefits of Prayer.
Prayer is a powerful connection to our Catholic faith as well as a significant protective factor in building resilience.

- Encourage the students to see prayer as yet another valuable tool in building their faith as well as their sense of well-being.
- Prayer can help us in supporting our faith as well as our sense of well-being.

Suggested script for secondary teachers:
- Encourage the students thinking about the value and power of our faith and prayer.
- In the classroom have a group discussion by asking the following questions: “When do people talk/pray to God or ask for guidance? What does prayer mean to you? What are the benefits of prayer? How can praying support your mental health? How do you feel after you “talk to” or pray to God?
- Each day at school in our Catholic faith we start our day with traditional prayer.
- As God is always listening to us, think about just talking to God.
Dear God:

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Amen
Alternative Activity “Gratitude Practice”

Time needed - 5 to 10 minutes

Learning Skills and Work Habits, Self-Regulation, Initiative

Keep in Mind
- A regular practice will allow students to focus their attention on encouraging moments and validate their own resiliency.
- This is a great way to finish the day with reflection of the day and encouragement.
- You might choose to do this as a “community circle” activity.

Instructions
1. While students are at their desk, on carpet or in a community circle introduce the Gratitude Moment.
   “We are going to take a few minutes to share what we are grateful for today. I will start. Today I am grateful for…”

2. Give everyone a chance to contribute.
   Some students may choose to “pass” as this may be a new experience and will take time to feel comfortable with it.

3. Feel free to adapt the idea to suit the needs of your classroom, example:
   Instead of sharing gratitude out loud, you may choose to have students write 1-3 things they are grateful for in a journal at the end of each day.
Exercise & Eat Healthy
There is strong relationship between eating healthy and staying active to having good mental health and well-being. According to Health Canada children and youth require at least 60 mins of moderate-vigorous physical activity daily. Physical activity and a balanced diet is essential to one's growth and development.

**Suggested elementary or secondary Classroom Activities:**

1. Stretch your back with a "big hug"
   - Hug your body, placing the right hand on your left shoulder and the left hand on your right shoulder.
   - Breathe in and out, releasing the area between your shoulder blades.

2. Cross your arms – for the shoulders and upper back
   - Extend one arm out straight in front of you. With the other hand, grab the elbow of the outstretched arm and pull it across your chest, stretching your shoulder and upper back muscles.
   - Stretch out the other arm in front of you – repeat.

3. Stretch your back and shoulders with a "leg hug"
   - Lean over, now bring your hands behind your legs, right hand grasping left wrist, forearm (or elbow if you can reach that far), and left hand grasping the right. Feel the stretch in your back, shoulders and neck. Hold
   - Release your hands to the floor again.
   - Repeat three times or as often as it feels good.
   - Time Needed - 3 to 5 minutes

**Learning Skills and Work Habits - Self-Regulation**

**Keep in Mind**
It is recommended to practice this activity on your own first.

**Model these movements as you say:**
- “Stand tall with your shoulders relaxed. Take a slow deep breath and let it out with a sigh. Try to let go of anything bugging you as you sigh one last time.
- Now breathe silently. Bring your palms together above your head and stretch them as high as you can. Relax your shoulders as you breathe out.
- Breathe in and gently lean from your hips to the right.
- On your next breath out, stretch just a little bit further. Breathe in and out as you come back to center. Breathe in and lean from your hips to the left. On your next breath out lean a little further then come back to center.
- Now bring your hands down a bit to the side, so your arms are bent at the elbow, remembering to keep your shoulders down. Bring your weight onto your right foot and lift your left foot off the ground. Gently put your left foot to the inside of your right leg. DO NOT put your foot on your knee. Imagine you are a tree and grow your branches out toward the sun.
Bring your left leg down and place your foot on the floor. Switch your weight over to your left foot. Lift your right foot and gently place it on the inside of your left leg but NOT on your knee. Take a slow breath in and grow toward the sun. Breathe out and relax your shoulders.

Bring your right foot down beside your left. Make your hands into fists and put them on your hips. Breathe in and stand tall, shoulders relaxed. Now twist from your waist to the left, as you breathe out. Take another breath and then twist a little further as you breathe out. Breathe in as you come back to center. Breathe out and twist from your waist to the right. Twist a little further on your next breath out. As you breathe in, slowly come back to center.

Bring your hands to your heart. Notice that you feel a little more relaxed and strong.”
Get Enough Sleep
Sleep plays a vital role in good health and our mental well-being. Having a proper sleep routine is essential to brain development and our emotional state.

We need sleep to keep us healthy, active and able to perform our best. When we are well rested we perform better in school. This helps our mood and we can solve problems more effectively. It is recommended that “kids ages 5-12 need an average 10-12 hours of sleep, and teens and adults require approximately 10 hours per night.” (Stats Canada)

So think about how much sleep you are getting and what your can do to improve your sleep routine.

**Suggested activity for elementary classroom:** Relaxation technique

The aim of this activity is to help students to better understand the value of proper sleep in supporting their physical and mental health. The students will be encouraged to learn relaxation techniques as a method to help them “prepare” for a better night’s sleep.

**Suggested script for elementary teachers:** Sleep plays an important part in our mental health and well-being.

- Sleep is the bodies’ opportunity to re-charge and prepare for the day ahead. (For the following day)
- Research indicates that the brain actually works during “sleep” to make sense of our learning and memories.
- It can be difficult for us to fall asleep when we are restless, anxious, or worried.
- Relaxation helps our bodies get ready to “fall asleep”. Here is a relaxation technique you can try at home to help you get ready to fall asleep.
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

How it works

- Students pay a “mental visit” to their muscles, stopping at each area of the body from head to toe (or toe to head), paying attention to individual areas where tension exists.
- As they pause at each area, they tense and relax each muscle, trying to release unnecessary tension.
- Students are encouraged to spend a few more moments on those areas that seem to be holding the most tension.

The benefit

In addition to reducing anxiety, relaxation has been shown to improve focus, concentration and mood,

- Encourage students to try this technique when winding down for bedtime.

Suggested activity for secondary classroom: Technology & Sleep Discussion

The aim of this activity is to help students understand the important role of sleep in their physical and mental health. More and more surveys are indicating that sleep disruption in youth is due in part to use of technology and on-line social media during the night. The role of technology as a sleep disruptor is a key learning objective.

Suggested script for secondary teachers:

- Sleep plays an important part in our mental health and well-being. Sleep is the bodies’ opportunity to re-charge and prepare for the day ahead. Research indicates that the brain actually works during “sleep” to make sense of our learning and memories. Technology has the potential to prevent us from getting enough sleep. We are going to take a look at a video that discusses the potential negative consequences of technology and social media, such as inducing social isolation. Sleep disturbances is an additional negative consequence.
- Show the YouTube video “Can we Auto Correct Humanity” “https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRI8ElhrQjQ
- Get feedback on the video.
- Then, have an open discussion: How does the use of technology impact sleeping?
- Ask questions such as: When do you turn off your devices, i.e. phone, IPad, video games, T.V. How many hours per day are you using your technology? How long can you go without checking your phone?
- Let them know that blue light from technology screens can delay sleep.
- Encourage students to brainstorm tips that can help them better manage their screen time, thereby improving sleep.
- For example ...TIPS: Charge your phone in another room at bedtime so it is does not interrupt your sleep. Turning your phone off or put it on silence, or turn notifications off for certain applications before going to bed. Consider not using any technology approximately 1-2 hours before bedtime.
Appendix A

Suggested PA Announcements

Monday, May 1, 2017

Today we are launching Mental Health Awareness Week. Each day this week a strategy will be read on the announcement to help improve our mental health. Today’s strategy is:

“Mindfulness is a way of being and thinking. When we are mindful, we focus our attention on what is happening in our body, our mind and in our environment in the moment. With mindfulness, we live in the present, focus on what is happening right now.” Mindfulness ambassador council guidebook TCDSB

Today, think about being present in the moment and being aware of your breathing. Being mindful helps us physically and emotionally & improves our mental well-being.

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

The second strategy for Mental Health Awareness week is:

One in 5 people experience mental illness. We all have mental health. Learning how to build mental health will help us to build our overall health. TCDSB has many supports and resources available. In partnership with families, the community and our Catholic education system we are committed to supporting all our students. Relationships and belonging are important to our health. Did you know that at school you can get support from your teacher, principal, vice principal, guidance counsellor and CYW? As well, additional supports, such as our school’s social worker and psychology staff are available. There are many caring adults in our schools and community ready to help.

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

Today is our third day of Mental Health Awareness week. Our strategy for today is:

“God is a source of comfort, strength and love for us. Through prayer we enter into a deeper relationship with God and gain a sense of attachment to Him. Many studies have shown that individuals who pray to a loving and protecting God with whom they have a meaningful relationship are less likely to experience anxiety and stress. Prayer offers emotional comfort and reduces stress.” Praying helps to improve our mental well-being.

www.spiritualityhealth.com; www.psychcentral.com
Thursday, May 4, 2017

Today is day four of Mental Health Awareness week. The strategy we are highlighting today is:

There is strong relationship between eating healthy and staying active to having good mental health and well-being. According to Health Canada children and youth require at-least 60 mins of moderate-vigorous physical activity daily. Physical activity and a balanced diet is essential to one’s growth and development.

Friday, May 5, 2017

Today is our last day of Mental Health Awareness Week. Today’s strategy is:

Sleep plays a vital role in good health and our mental well-being. Having a proper sleep routine is essential to brain development and our emotional state.

We need sleep to keep us healthy, active and able to perform our best. When we are well rested we perform better in school. This helps our mood and we can solve problems more effectively. It is recommended that "kids ages 5-12 need an average 10-12 hours of sleep, and teens and adults require approximately 10 hours per night." (Stats Canada)

So think about how much sleep you are getting and what your can do to improve your sleep routine.

We wish you all good Mental Health! If you participated in any of the activities for Mental Health Week we hope that you had a good time!
Acknowledgements:

Children’s Mental Health Awareness Toolkit Writing Team

Marci Buhagiar   Psychologist, TCDSB
Sarah Hogg-Silva   Social Worker, TCDSB
Patricia Marra-Stapleton   Mental Health Leader, TCDSB
Brenda Welsh   Social Worker, TCDSB

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- The Thames Valley District School Board’s “Everyday Practices for Mental Health and Well-Being in the Classroom” Guide.
- Webmd.com
- Classroommentalhealth.org