

TCDSB Student Mental Health Newsletter



Fall 2019



Transition Back to School

Returning to school can elicit a mixed bag of emotions for students. While it may be exciting to think about reuniting with school friends or upcoming events that will take place this year, there may also be some anxiety around new routines and expectations, academic work, or peer dynamics. Transitioning back to school may be particularly challenging for students with learning disabilities and/or mental health struggles. Here are a few tips to ensure a good start to the new academic year for all:



1. **Express excitement** about the new school year and highlight upcoming opportunities or activities.
2. **Encourage your child to self-reflect** on last school year in order to set goals for this year (e.g., which goals were met; what was difficult; what worked?). Set new goals and discuss manageable steps to work towards the goals.
3. **Encourage your child to get involved** in teams, clubs, or other extra-curricular activities. This type of involvement can foster a sense of belonging and increase self-esteem.
4. **Establish collaborative relationships** with your child's teacher(s) and other members of his/her support team (e.g., resource teacher, EA, CYW) early in the school year. Set up a meeting or a phone call and discuss your child's strengths, needs, and goals.
5. **Discuss expectations about homework and study times.** Involve your child in setting up an appropriate homework space and/or a portable homework "kit" with needed supplies.
6. **Involve your child in creating a schedule** that includes getting enough sleep, outdoor exercise, and boundaries around screen time.

HAPPY "NEW YEAR!"

The new school year is a good time to set new habits. Consider meeting together as a family to discuss a family goal.

The TCDSB Mental Health Team wishes all families a smooth transition back to school and a productive, enjoyable Fall!

Getting Back to a Sleep Routine

After enjoying late summer nights and having little routine in place throughout the day, it can often be a struggle to get back into a sleep schedule. Good sleep hygiene supports us in feeling re-energized for those early morning wake-ups and fueled throughout the school day. Here are 3 easy ways to improve your sleep (for both parents and kids!):

Maintain a regular schedule – ensure you are going to sleep and waking up at the same time every day. As you are building this habit, it might be useful to keep a sleep log to track timing until your body clock gets used to a consistent pattern.

Choose a relaxing sleep time activity – refrain from using screen time including computer, phone, or TV as a go-to bedtime ritual. These devices will only stimulate alertness in the mind and make it more difficult to fall asleep. Instead, try going for a walk, talking to a friend, or reading a book to promote relaxation.

Spend less time in bed – this includes staying in bed after your alarm goes off in the morning, and when you find yourself awake or unable to sleep at night. During these times, it can often be helpful to leave the bedroom until your mind has quieted down. If you find your mind is still racing, try falling asleep or waking up to a mindfulness/meditation exercise, relaxing sounds, or a story. Some of my personal favourites are available on the free version of an app called *Calm*. Sleep well! (Written by: School Social Worker Amanda Costabile)

(Source: National Sleep Foundation)

Attendance Matters!

School attendance and school success go hand in hand. Not only do students lose valuable opportunities for learning when they are absent, they also lose opportunities to connect with caring adults as well as their peers. Meaningful connections with others can act as a buffer against stress, can enhance happiness, and can even protect us against depression. See the following tips to help with getting your child to school regularly so they can reap the benefits!

- **Set good habits in September.** Research shows that students who miss between 2 and 4 days in September continue to miss 2-3 days on average each month, totaling about 25 days for the year!
- **Help your child get organized the night before** (e.g., lay out clothes, make lunches, pack backpacks).
- **Ensure your child is getting enough sleep** (9 to 11 hours per night for ages 5–13 years; 8 to 10 hours per night for ages 14–17 years).
- **If your child reports feeling unwell frequently, speak to your family doctor;** be aware that frequent complaints of a stomach ache or headache can be a sign of anxiety.
- **Talk to teachers and the school principal if your child seems anxious** about going to school and/or there are other barriers to regular attendance. There are many supports available at school (e.g., guidance counselors, social workers, psychology staff, CYW's).

(Sources: Attendance Works.org; PsychologyToday.com; Baltimore Education Research Consortium, July 2014); Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines)



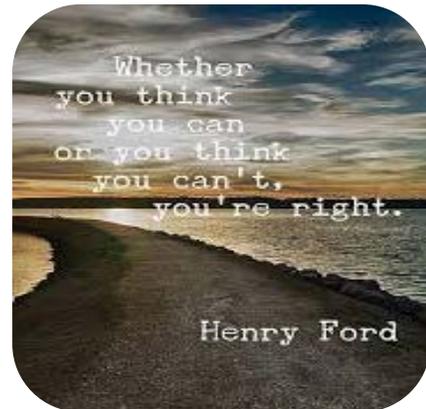
Rooted in Christ: We Believe

As the second year of our current three-year pastoral plan begins, let us reflect on the concept of *believing*. As a community of believers, we know that God is present in all of us. To strengthen both our faith and our mental health it is important that we believe in ourselves.

Our core beliefs begin developing in childhood, so consider the following tips for influencing your child's beliefs about him/herself:

1. **Praise positive character traits** that you witness in action (e.g., if you see your child comforting an upset sibling or friend, remark that the child is a caring person).
2. **Praise effort rather than result.** When you praise hard work your child will feel capable and will believe that hard work pays off.
3. **If you hear the words "I can't,"** encourage the child to remember a time when he/she accomplished something else that was challenging.
4. **When you hear a negative statement from your child,** help him/her to write down the reasons the belief might not be true.
5. **Remember: "the way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice"** (Peggy O'Mara).

(Sources: PsychologyToday.com; Allparenting.com)



Supporting Your Child through Hard Emotions

As parents, we want to see our children happy. When we see they are unhappy we often jump into "fix-it" mode. Whether that means trying to cheer them up, distract them from their distress, or solve their problems, it is best to avoid the urge to "fix" right away. Children/youth need to feel free to experience and express a range of emotions in order to come to acceptance that these emotions are part of life and that they are not permanent. Acceptance of emotion helps develop resilience. To support your child/youth during hard times, practice reflective listening. Listen for the emotion in their stories and reflect it back to them (e.g., "It sounds like math was very overwhelming today."). When they feel heard and validated, it will bring the emotion down and they may then be ready to problem solve with your assistance.

(Sources: PsychologyToday.com (05/21/13); Washington Post, (08/26/19))

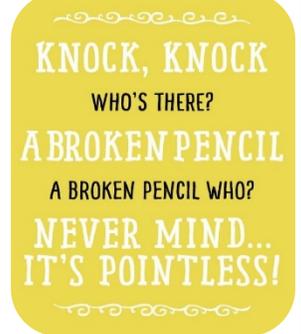


A Laugh a Day...

The **Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines** have been referenced throughout this newsletter. Take a closer look at the recommendations for Sleep, Screen Time, and Physical Activity at this link:

www.csepguidelines.ca

A **2019 study** revealed that only 5% of children are meeting the recommendations in all three categories. Thirty percent are not meeting ANY of the recommendations (Source: AAP Publications, 2019/08/21).



Community Mental Health Resources

Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868 www.kidshelpphone.ca

Professional and confidential counseling available 24/7 via phone. Text and live chat are also available (see website).

What's Up Walk-in Counseling www.whatsupwalkin.ca

Professional, confidential walk-in counseling for children, youth, and their families. No fee. No appointment. Health card not required. Six locations across Toronto. See website for locations and hours of operation.

211 Toronto www.211toronto.ca

24/7 information and referral to community and social services.

Featured Mental Health Resource:

Mental Health T.O. is a free phone service to help connect anyone under the age of 18 to mental health and addiction services in their community.

Phone: 1-866-585-6486 (9 a.m. – 5 p.m.)

* For more information visit the website: www.mentalhealthto.ca *

September 21st is International Day of Peace. Let us all remember that:



This newsletter is brought to you by the TCDSB Mental Health Team. Feel free to contact us with any comments, questions, or suggestions at 416-222-8282 (extensions below):

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