

May, 2016

Student Mental Health and Well-Being



Newsletter



What Can You Do To Support Children's Mental Health?



In Ontario Children's **Mental Health Awareness Week** is the first week of May. The aim of this week is to increase awareness about the signs children and youth may display when they have a mental health problem, decrease stigma associated with mental illness, and help people realize that help is available and treatment works. Given that one in five children and youth has a mental health problem it's vital that we support children's mental health.

The TCDSB Mental Health Steering Committee has developed a **Mental Health Awareness Toolkit** that has been shared with schools. The toolkit provides classroom activities that are linked to some of the health topics in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum. This year the five strategies that can be used to support children's mental health are:

Be Mindful: "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" ~ *Jon Kabat-Zinn*. Engage in mindfulness activities for a few minutes each day or week with your class.

Reach Out: Asking for help may be a difficult task for many students. Students may not be aware of the many supports and resources that available in our school community. Engage in classroom discussions about "how" to ask for help as well as "who" students can access for support. Encourage students to become aware and further develop their own personal support network.

Pray: Praying helps to improve our mental health by offering emotional comfort and reducing stress. Encourage children and youth to engage in daily prayer or "conversations" with God.

Get Enough Sleep: Engage in conversations about sleep routines. Discuss the important role that sleep plays in our emotional well being.

Exercise and Eat Healthy: Exercising and eating healthy is another aspect of good mental health. Speak with students about healthy choices when deciding on what to eat and engaging in physical exercise.

Depression: It's More Than "Just Sadness"

Many children and youth have a feeling of sadness when they are faced with a setback or disappointment. It's a normal feeling associated with certain life events. Typically these feelings of sadness do not last long and children and youth learn strategies to cope and adapt.

When children and youth have a prolonged feeling of sadness, are irritable, or have a loss of interest in activities they would typically enjoy they may be struggling with depression. When these feelings interfere with a student's day to day functioning it's time to provide support or intervention eg. relationships with peers, lack of engagement, ongoing academic struggles, or difficulties at home.

Some common signs that you might observe when a student is struggling with depression are: ongoing sadness, cranky mood, lack of energy, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, excessive crying over relatively small things, frequent physical complaints, spending time alone, recurrent thoughts about death or suicide, not participating, declining marks, loss of weight, or irregular attendance.

As educators and parents/guardians we can support students who are struggling with depression by:

- Modeling and teaching positive attitudes. Use language that sends a message of hope and optimism in your daily conversations.
- Engage in class discussions about the use of coping strategies. Practice how to problem solve using real life challenging situations.
- Designate a space in the classroom where students can go when they are feeling overwhelmed and need to calm themselves
- Help to increase a student's self esteem by providing positive feedback and compliments, acknowledging students as they enter the classroom, and focusing on specific tasks that the student does well
- Assist a student who is socially isolated by connecting them with peers with similar interests eg. encourage involvement in school clubs, organize games at recess
- Give opportunities for students to participate in making decisions about classroom activities

Information obtained from "Supporting Minds: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Students' Mental Health and Well-Being" ~ Government of Ontario.

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference ~ *Rienhold Niebuhr*

Fostering The Family:

The TCDSB Pastoral Plan 2015-18 “ Together With one Voice: Harmonizing Our Faith Through Family, Parish, and School” 2015 focuses on the FAMILY

There are many things that parents/guardians can do if they are concerned about their child’s mental health

- Talk to your child/adolescent
- Educate yourself
- Know the signs
- Speak with your child/adolescent’s teacher and inquire about support at school
- Ask your physician about treatment
- Talk to other parents who have experienced similar concerns

Information from: “It Starts Here: A Guide to Mood Disorders for Teens” ~ Mood Disorder Association of Ontario

Mental Health Initiatives 2015-2016



- TCDSB Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy 2015-18 approved Jan. 14, 2016
<https://www.tcdsb.org/programsservices/specialeducation/mhs/pages/mental-health-strategy.aspx>
- Building partnerships with community agencies, families, and parishes
- SAFE TALK suicide awareness workshops for staff available via PAL
- Support for schools in developing a mentally healthy classroom. See Supporting Minds on the Ministry’s website and edugains.ca

Obtained from www.thestar.com

May, 2016

Suggested Readings and Websites:

Books:

Sometimes I Get Sad (But Now I Know What Makes Me Happy) ~ Jane Ratcliffe

The Princess and the Fog ~ Lloyd Jones (ages 5-7)

Battling the Blues: the Handbook for Helping Children and Teens with Depression ~ Kim “Tip” Frank

Lonely, Sad and Angry: a Parent's Guide to Depression in Children and Adolescents ~ Barbara Ingersoll & Sam Goldstein

What to Do When You're Cranky & Blue: a Guide for Kids ~ James Crist

Websites:

www.kidsmentalhealth.ca

www.hinksdellcrest.org/ABC/Welcome

www.ementalhealth.ca

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/SupportingMinds

www.thereachinstitute.org

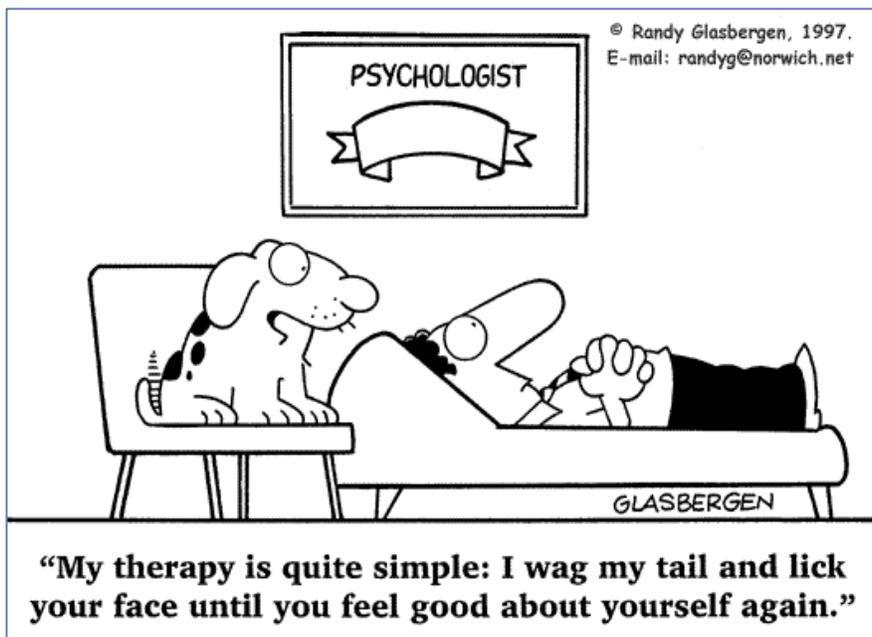
www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/healthyschools.html

www.ldaschool.ca

A Laugh A Day...

“A good sense of humor is a tool that kids can rely on throughout life...” It helps children to “see beyond the surface of things” and “not take themselves too seriously”.

www.kidshealth.org



Patricia Marra-Stapleton, Psychological Associate/Mental Health Lead

patricia.marra-stapleton@tcdsb.org

Marci Buhagiar, Psychologist

marci.buhagiar@tcdsb.org