

Learning about Mental Health and Well-being

Mental health and well-being concepts are woven throughout the HPE curriculum. Students learn skills for mental health and emotional well-being that contribute to healthy growth and development. There are opportunities to learn about mental health and well-being through direct, planned instruction and also through indirect instruction and a supportive learning environment for students to learn. The curriculum was significantly strengthened in 2010 to include this learning and has been strengthened further in 2015 in response to expert review, the introduction of Ontario’s Mental Health and Addictions strategy and confirmed need articulated through the additional parent and student consultation. The most direct learning about mental health is within the healthy living strand, however there are opportunities across the curriculum for students to learn about and learn skills for mental health and well-being. In the revised HPE curriculum, Living Skills are integrated across the curriculum and provide a strong basis for developing skills for supporting mental health. Students learn self-awareness, self-monitoring and adaptive, management and coping skills. Communication and critical thinking skills are also components of living skills. In younger grades, students learn about identifying sources of stress and positive coping mechanisms. They learn skills for personal resilience and for relating positively with others. As students grow, they learn more about accessing support for challenging situations, and about stereotypes and stigma, including stigma associated with mental illness. The focus in the curriculum is on promoting and maintaining mental health while also building an understanding of mental illness and reducing stigma associated with mental illness.

Changes to the revised curriculum in 2015 include shifting some learning expectations from grade 10 to grade 9 so that more students having access to information and skills before they are likely to need them to make decisions. To receive an OSSD, one HPE credit is mandatory and most students take that credit in grade 9. The learning about warning signs and prevention and response for mental health challenges has been strengthened. Notes for educators

about seeking additional help as needed and approaching learning about topics such as suicide with caution have been added. Some instructional guidance and reference to additional resources are provided in the curriculum.

Throughout the revised Gr. 1-12 curriculum there are comprehensive learning opportunities to develop knowledge and skills related to mental health and well-being including:

- recognizing sources of stress, and identifying adaptive, management and coping skills
- relationship and social skills, including how to identify and build healthy relationships
- understanding how physical activity supports mental health and well-being
- understanding factors that contribute to emotional well-being
- substance use/addictions, and how to take action to get help
- mental health concerns – warning signs and responses, reducing stigma

“Big ideas” related to mental health within the curriculum and identified by through an expert review of the curriculum include:

1. There is a strong mind-body connection. Healthy active living can enhance mental functioning and enjoyment in life.
2. Personal, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills can help to enhance wellbeing and a sense of belonging.
3. Self-awareness is an important skill that includes mental health literacy (recognition of warning signs of emotional difficulty, support seeking)
4. Stress and hardship are a part of life. Skills for adaptive coping are an important part of resiliency.
5. We all have a responsibility to recognize and address stigma related to mental health problems, and to reach out in supportive ways to those in need.

Focus of Learning

Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 7-8	Gr. 9-10	Gr. 11-12
<p>Learning to identify feelings and emotions is a foundational skill for mental health.</p> <p>As students are learning factors that impact healthy growth and development, prompts are included to help students consider social and emotional well-being as well as physical well-being.</p> <p>The Living Skill expectation related to self-awareness and self-monitoring skills including recognizing sources of stress remains the same from grades 1-12. Grade and strand-specific examples are included to show progression in learning from grade to grade and to illustrate how this learning can be integrated across the curriculum.</p> <p>In addition to participation in physical activity, metacognitive skills are emphasized in the revised curriculum. Students are learning the benefits of physical activity, including physical, social, cognitive and emotional benefits.</p>	<p>Building developmentally from primary where students were learning to identify feelings, students in junior grades continue to learn to recognize and articulate emotions and feelings.</p> <p>Some students at this age will be beginning puberty, so students begin to learn about changes in their bodies and also associated mental, social and emotional changes.</p> <p>Expectations related to managing stress reflect some significantly strengthened learning related to mental health and emotional well-being. Expectations also include explicit instruction about strategies for understanding and managing stress and responding to additional pressures that are a part of adolescence.</p> <p>Learning about the concepts of protective and risk factors associated with mental health and well-being help students consider things that are within their realm of control related to their own well-being.</p>	<p>The relationship between mental health and substance abuse is explicitly addressed in Grade 7.</p> <p>Prompts are used to explain the nuances and sensitivities associated with these topics and to support reducing stigma related to mental health problems.</p> <p>Revisions were made to strengthen learning about mental, highlighting possible harm connected to concussions, mental health or addiction problems. The addition of help-seeking behaviours as a strategy to reduce risk is a change in response to expert review.</p> <p>Expectations reflect students’ building understanding about mental health in a holistic way, acknowledging that stress can be both positive and negative.</p> <p>Part of the learning is about coping skills and strategies for caring for their mental health.</p>	<p>A note was added as a flag for educators to approach conversations and instruction about suicide with caution. Additional guidance for educators is provided in the front matter of the curriculum noting that learning about suicide is best approached through structured, adult-led instruction and cautioning that thoughts of suicide can be triggered in students who are vulnerable to casual comments or by information shared in large-group settings.</p> <p>A link to Supporting Minds: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being, 2013 is provided.</p> <p>The Kids Help Phone number is included for easy reference for educators.</p> <p>The learning continues to build from elementary grades where the concepts of protective and risk factors were introduced.</p>	<p>While the focus throughout the curriculum is on mental health and well-being, more specific and in-depth learning about mental illnesses and mental health problems is introduced in later grades.</p> <p>As students prepare for transition out of high school, the focus of the learning related to mental health includes consideration of coping skills for life after high school.</p> <p>Expectations were revised with consideration given to expert advice regarding making connections to school board mental health plans when planning mental health promotion within schools, and also to flag the need for caution regarding planning events which could unintentionally cause harm.</p>