

7.1

MENTAL HEALTH, MENTAL ILLNESS, AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEM

This is the first in a series of three modules to address the mental health literacy expectations within Strand D of the Grade 7 Health and Physical Education curriculum. The module introduces the concepts of **mental health** and **mental illness** (recognizing and respecting a diversity of perspectives and that these concepts may vary across cultures), and ways to promote positive mental health strategies. When students feel a sense of **belonging, purpose, meaning, and, hope**, they are likely to feel a strong sense of positive mental health, well-being, and connection.

Note: Remind students that the focus is on learning facts and reliable information rather than sharing personal stories. If there is a personal situation a student would like to speak about, invite them to see you after class and share ideas about additional resources at the end of each module.

It is important to provide students with a **supportive transition** following mental health learning. A list of easy-to-use activities and suggested prompts to encourage students to seek help are included at the end of each module so students can transition to the rest of their day in a positive way.

CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

- **D1.6** - demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between mental health and mental illness and identify possible signs of **mental health problems**.

What is the difference between a mental health problem and a mental illness?

Mental illness refers to conditions diagnosed by a qualified professional. It impacts our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and overall well-being. It can get in the way of what we want and need to do and can influence our ability to enjoy life. Throughout the modules the term mental health problem has been used to refer more broadly to any mental health concern, including those which have or have not been formally diagnosed. For further definitions of key terms, refer to the individual modules and the glossary in the [Ontario HPE curriculum](#).

- Refer to the Health and Physical Education curriculum document for a variety of considerations to support planning and delivery of this learning for every student (e.g., students with special education needs and English Language Learners).

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning:

- To demonstrate an understanding of mental health, mental illness, and the dual continuum: (recognizing and respecting a diversity of perspectives).
- To identify factors that may impact our mental health.
- Strategies that respect students as complex individuals with diverse needs to support positive mental health.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Co-develop success criteria with students using the following questions: "How will we know we are achieving our learning goals? What will it look like/sound like?" For example:

- I can describe mental health, and mental illness, and explain how they are related
- I have identified mental health strategies that work for me.

MATERIALS

- Explore Mental Health: A Notebook for Grade 7 Health and Physical Education
- A computer and projector/smartboard
- Sticky notes/small squares of paper (or a virtual equivalent)
- Pencils/pens/markers
- Paper for two anchor charts (optional)

Minds On

Building an Understanding ~ 5 min

PURPOSE: To support students in building definitions of mental health and mental illness.

NOTE: It is suggested that this activity be completed together as a whole class so educators can guide the conversation and avoid the unintentional reinforcement of myths and misconceptions related to mental health that may occur within smaller groups. Information about common mental health myths can be found in this tip sheet.

TEACHER PROMPT "To start this learning we want to define some key terms. Let's start with the term 'mental health' - what comes to mind when you think about mental health?"

INSTRUCTION 1

Ask students what comes to mind when they think about **mental health**. Ask students to share their thoughts by recording a single word, short phrase, or image on each paper. This is intended to be **quick**. Encourage students to write down or draw the first things that come to mind.

It's important that students record **one idea per paper** so that ideas can be sorted, if necessary, later in the activity.

TIP

- Use sticky notes/small squares of paper or a virtual equivalent. Choose the method that best suits your learning situation and the needs of students.
- Encourage students to brainstorm by writing down (in a language of their choice) or drawing a variety of ideas. Reassure them that they can't get it wrong.

INSTRUCTION 2

Share the definitions for mental health and mental illness.

Mental Health is a state of well-being that includes a range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It influences how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. It is part of our overall health and plays an important role in our ability to enjoy life.

Mental Illness refers to conditions diagnosed by a qualified professional. It impacts our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and overall well-being. It can get in the way of the day-to-day tasks that we want and need to do, our relationships, and our ability to enjoy life.

TIP

- Have students hold on to their ideas for the next part of this activity.

TEACHER PROMPT "When we talk about mental health, we often think about mental illness. They are not the same thing, even though the terms are often confused by many people. Mental health is something we all have. We all want good mental health for ourselves and those we care about. That is why we are learning about it today".

INSTRUCTION 3

Now that students have heard definitions for mental health and mental illness, have them look back at the words and ideas they generated when thinking about mental health. If they have words that would fit with the definition of both mental health and mental illness, have them sort them into two piles.

Questions to guide the discussion:

- Do the words/ideas/images you wrote down when you thought of mental health fit with the definition we just read? Why or why not?
- Why did some of the words/ideas need to be sorted into another pile?

Note: Students may find that the mental illness pile is larger than the mental health pile. This may be because when we consider mental health, mental illness often comes to mind.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS (*extension– space for responses is provided in the student notebook*)

- Is being mentally healthy the same as being happy?
- Does not having a mental illness mean you are mentally healthy?
- Does having a mental illness mean you can't have good mental health?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

As a class, use the ideas from students along with the provided definitions to build a class definition for mental health, and mental illness. This would be a good time to also consider definitions that recognize and respect a diversity of perspectives. One way to do this is to define mental health and mental illness in broad terms (e.g., mental health is a state of well-being that encompasses the presence of positive emotions and experiences) and to consider multiple conceptualizations of mental health (including those beyond the Western model).

The discussion guide contains further helpful tips and information to support you in guiding this discussion.

STUDENT VOICE

This activity provides an important opportunity to acknowledge that mental health is a concept that can vary across individuals and cultures. Discussing a variety of definitions with students can help create space for them to share their own understandings. Consider ways you can learn from these understandings, rather than just talk about them.

BRIGHT IDEAS

Consider posting the co-created definitions in your learning space (physical or virtual) as anchor charts to be referenced throughout these modules. Space to capture the definitions is also provided in the student notebook.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

This activity has natural connections to expectations within the Grade 7 Language curriculum. For example:

- **Strand D Composition: Expressing Ideas and Creating Texts D1. Developing Ideas and Organizing Content:**
- plan, develop ideas, gather information, and organize content for creating texts of various forms, including digital and media texts, on a variety of topics.

Action 1

Promoting Positive Mental Health ~ 15 min

PURPOSE: To give students an opportunity to think about wellness and positive strategies that support their mental health.

NOTE: This activity is based on an Indigenous conceptualization of mental health and wellness. We are learning from Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding mental health as a balance of our mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional dimensions. The format of the graphic organizer was inspired by Kids Help Phone's Wheel of Well-Being.

TEACHER PROMPT "In this activity, we will be learning from the knowledge and wisdom of Indigenous peoples - First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. These perspectives and ways of knowing offer us valuable insights into learning how to take care of our mental health from a holistic understanding. This broader understanding of mental health helps shape a more inclusive and diverse perspective of mental health and ways of supporting it".

INSTRUCTION 1

Introduce the 'My Strategy Circle' activity and unpack each of the categories in the organizer with students. The discussion guide will support you with this conversation.

TIP

INSTRUCTION 2

Students use the 'My Strategy Circle' organizer found in their notebook to record the personal strategies that help provide them with a sense of balance and positive well-being.

TIP

The categories in the organizer are designed to help students sort their thinking, but also to stretch their thinking. Maybe there are some strategies they use regularly that they don't even recognize. Maybe they haven't considered that their strategies are all one type. Although strategies are unique to each person, having strategies in multiple categories can help create a physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual balance.

INSTRUCTION 3

Gather together for a group discussion.

STUDENT VOICE

Consider taking this opportunity to create a class list of helpful strategies to refer to later on.

TIP

Invite students to share a helpful strategy that they like to use. Encourage the class to consider whether any of the strategies shared by their peers is something they'd like to try or add to their organizer.

BRIGHT IDEAS

There are no wrong answers. This will help encourage participation/ healthy discussion/debate about different kinds of strategies and why some can be more effective than others.

INSTRUCTION 4

Encourage students to do some thinking and reflecting on their organizer. Use the provided questions to prompt individual student reflection to inform the next step. Students may choose to share their thoughts with the class, or to work with a classmate to review their organizer.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS (*extension – space for responses is provided in the student notebook*):

- Look at your circle. What do you notice?
Are there any areas within the circle where you would like to build more balance?
How could you do so? Do you need any ideas or support?
- Do you have strategies you can use in different situations, like during the school day or during summer break?
- Where are your opportunities to try something new?

INSTRUCTION 5

Give students a few minutes to go back into the organizer with a different colored pen or pencil and add a few additional strategies to try. Encourage students to return to the organizer as it is never really complete! As they come across new learning and experiences, they will develop new strategies all throughout life.

TEACHER PROMPT "We all need a variety of strategies so we can adapt when our everyday life changes. For example – a physical injury, stormy weather, exam time, or travel could all create situations that change the availability of your preferred strategies. This is why your circle is so important. You'll be ready and prepared to adapt to different circumstances and feel well".

TRY IT! Your mental health matters too! Consider doing this activity alongside students. Completing your own organizer may be a helpful reflection and offers great modeling for students.

Action 2

Exploring the Relationship between Mental Health and Mental Illness ~ 15 min

PURPOSE: To discuss the relationship between mental health and mental illness (which is a dual continuum) and help students understand that mental health and mental illness are two separate yet connected concepts.

INSTRUCTION

- A video and educator [discussion guide](#) have been provided to assist in this learning. The student bios, discussion questions, and space to take notes are also provided in their notebook.

TEACHER PROMPT "When we explored definitions of mental health and mental illness, we talked about how they are different concepts. Now we are going to talk about the connection between them. This video will get us started and offer some examples. This is only one possible way of thinking about mental health and mental illness. There are other ways of understanding it that can vary across individuals, communities, and cultures".

[Access the video transcript](#)

TRY IT!

While students are exploring definitions of mental health and mental illness, reflect on your individual understanding of these terms and how your understanding is impacted by important influences in your life (e.g., community, culture, family, etc.).

Consolidation

Sharing Strategies and Learnings ~ 5 min

PURPOSE: To give students the opportunity to reflect on the learning and share their ideas.

Note: This student reflection is intended to be flexible. You may ask students to reflect individually or share their reflections (e.g., orally with a partner or the larger group, or through post it notes or other virtual tools). Students may also capture their reflections in their notebook.

- What did you find interesting or helpful about what you learned?
- Did anything surprise you? Is there anything you are still wondering about?
- Has anything changed in terms of the way you think about mental health?
- We all have mental health. What supports yours?

KEY LEARNINGS

- Mental health and mental illness are two **separate** yet **connected** concepts.
- Mental health is something we **all** have. We all want **good mental health** for ourselves and those we care about.
- There are **many perspectives** about mental health and mental illness. They are concepts that **can vary across cultures**.
- Many factors may influence and support our mental health. They **can be different** for each of us.

PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION

You can use this brief [parent/guardian communication](#) to share and continue the learning following student participation in this module.

SUPPORTIVE TRANSITION

A **supportive transition** from mental health learning is recommended. Please see a list of easy-to-use transition activities, as well as suggested prompts to support students in seeking help within the [Supportive Transitions Tip Sheet](#). This is an important part of the learning and should be repeated each time the module is paused or completed.

Appendix A

MENTAL HEALTH MYTHS

When you consider and share diverse conceptualizations of mental health with students, it can open doors for them to share their own concepts of mental health and invite other understandings. Whatever conceptualizations are shared it is important to be open and respectful and not reinforce stigma. Here are a few suggestions:

If you hear any of the following mental health myths during the discussion, here are some suggestions about how you might respond.

MYTHS

- Mental illness is rare.
- Mental illness only affects adults.
- Mental illness is caused by personal weakness/lack of willpower or character flaw.
- People with mental illness are dangerous or violent.
- Mental illness can't be treated.
- Only people with severe mental illness see mental health professionals.
- Seeking help for mental illness is a sign of weakness.

FACTS

- **Mental illness is actually common.** About 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental illness at some point in their lives. It affects many of us, or someone we care about.
- Mental illness can affect people of all ages, including children and youth.
- Mental illness is a medical condition that is caused by a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, and social factors.
- Most people with mental illness are not dangerous or violent. And just because someone is violent or dangerous doesn't mean they have a mental illness.
- There are many effective treatments available to help mental illness, including lifestyle choices, support from a mental health professional, and medication.
- Mental health treatment can help many people, including those with milder concerns. Seeking help early can prevent things from getting worse and help us feel better sooner.
- Seeking help for mental illness is a sign of strength. It takes courage to recognize when you need help and to take steps to get it.

Appendix B

MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL ILLNESS EDUCATOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Mental health and mental illness are concepts that can vary across individuals and cultures. In Western culture, mental health is often understood through the lens of the individual. Helpful techniques involve exploring ways a person can build a range of strategies for maintaining wellness and for coping with stress and challenge.

Mental Health is a state of well-being that includes a range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It influences how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. It is part of our overall health and plays an important role in our ability to enjoy life.

Mental illness refers to conditions diagnosed by a qualified mental health professional. It impacts our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and overall well-being. It can get in the way of the day-to-day tasks that we want and need to do, our relationships, and our ability to enjoy life.

It is essential to recognize that each culture has unique ways of knowing and being, and understanding mental health and mental illness, that may differ from mainstream Western approaches to mental health.

Educators can help to create a more culturally responsive learning environment by recognizing that not all cultures may use the same terminology or approach to mental health. For example, Indigenous understandings of mental health are often more holistic and rooted in culture and community. In many African cultures, traditional healing practices takes a holistic approach to mental health that involve spiritual rituals, ceremonies, dancing, drumming and storytelling. In traditional Chinese medicine, a holistic approach is taken that views mental health and mental illness in relation to the balance of energy or "Qi" in the body. These are three examples of many.

DID YOU KNOW?

Indigenous communities share similarities in cultural ways on understanding mental health, such as holistic approaches and community connections. It is also important to acknowledge the unique differences among communities that are rooted in distinct cultural practices, languages and traditions.

First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (Health Canada & Assembly of First Nations, 2014) **defines mental health and well-being as a balance of the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional.** This balance is in place when we have:

- purpose in our daily lives,
- hope for the future,
- a sense of belonging and connectedness within our families, to community, and to culture,
- a sense of meaning and an understanding of how our lives and those of our families and communities are part of creation and a rich history.

Appendix C

FINDING YOUR BALANCE EDUCATOR DISCUSSION GUIDE (ACTION 1)

Introduce the following activity and unpack each of the categories.

TEACHER PROMPT: "We all use and need different activities and strategies to support our mental health and well-being. Sometimes we use them without even realizing we're supporting our mental health. What works will be different for everyone--some categories will be more important to each of us. Today we will think about what fits for each of us and reflect on the overall balance of the types of strategies we use".

Category and Descriptions:

- **Move:** Physical activities that get our bodies moving. Encourage students to think beyond the more obvious high energy activities like sports and include ideas like breathing activities and stretching, Tai Chi, and yoga, knowing movement looks different for everyone.
- **Create:** How do students express themselves? Drawing, baking a cake, building something, or playing the guitar are examples of creative expressions that can be excellent strategies!
- **Connect:** This category is wide open to a variety of connections and relationships. Encourage students to think beyond the more obvious relationships we have with people. We also find connection through our faith, pets/creatures, the land, water, and other spaces and places.
- **Chill:** These are activities you find relaxing, such as listening to music, star gazing, eating a favourite snack, breathing deeply, meditation, prayer, or taking a quiet moment to do nothing at all.
- **Plan:** These are short- and long-term goals, hopes, dreams, and plans for the future. Examples include success in school/hobbies, maintaining routines, and ideas for career and travel.
- **Contribute:** These activities could include ways that students help the people they live with, how they contribute to their school or community, or ways they help a friend or pet.
- **Think:** These are activities that activate the mind, like learning a new skill, or doing a crossword or jigsaw puzzle.

As part of this activity, you may wish to encourage students to consider whether their current strategies are helping in the ways that they had hoped (e.g., is the time spent on social media helping them relax or is it contributing to feelings of stress?), or if there are other strategies that might be more helpful.

Appendix D

THE DUAL CONTINUUM EDUCATOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Note: This discussion provides opportunities to help students consider a wide variety of factors that can impact our mental health, including marginalization, discrimination, unpredictability in life outside school, poverty, food insecurity, and many others.

Haris

Factors: Haris does not have a mental illness. Haris's graduation year isn't turning out the way he had hoped. He didn't make the soccer team and feels he doesn't fit in at school, and he's finding his schoolwork difficult. It's an important year to him, so he is disappointed, doubting himself and his abilities, and wondering if he's missing out on things. He fits within "poor mental health without mental illness" as he is facing some challenges and disappointments and struggling with how to manage them.

Strategies: Haris is using video games as a strategy to feel better.

Opportunities: This is an opportunity to talk about transitions and the expectations we sometimes have for important milestones. It's also an opportunity to reinforce how having a few different strategies available can help us from relying heavily on one (you may wish to refer back to the Finding Your Balance activity in Action 1). Haris is using one strategy so much, he's not enjoying it anymore. Overusing one strategy can also get in the way of other things in our lives and sometimes create its own challenges. It can help to balance out one strategy with other options.

Nia

Factors: Nia does not have a mental illness. Nia is experiencing an issue with a friendship and financial stress at home. They fit within "good mental health without mental illness." Although they are facing a challenge, they have skills and supports to manage it and are continuing to have good quality of life.

Strategies: They have tried several strategies, including reaching out for support, spending more time with family and their pet, and participating in hobbies and interests they enjoy.

Opportunities: This is an opportunity to talk about how facing challenges doesn't mean we necessarily have poor mental health. If we have supports and strategies to manage them, we can continue to experience good mental health even when things are not perfect.

Aaeden

Factors: Aaeden has symptoms of a mental illness but has not yet connected with anyone about how he is feeling. He is experiencing difficulty with his mood. He's also noticing changes in his eating and sleeping habits, and his school attendance and marks. He fits within "poor mental health with mental illness" because the changes he is experiencing are getting in the way of his life and don't seem to be getting better with time. The symptoms of mental illness he is experiencing are what are impacting his mental health.

Strategies: Aaeden isn't sure what to do. He tried music as a strategy, but it didn't seem to help. The way he's feeling may be getting in the way of other strategies he might ordinarily

use (e.g., participating in choir and drama). He also feels very tired (which can impact our ability to try strategies) and out of ideas. Aaeden may need support to find strategies that work for him, given the way he is feeling (and seeking support IS a mental health strategy!).

Opportunities: This is a great opportunity to talk about how mental health isn't just an individual responsibility. Other people, places, and things can help support us, too. This is also a place to note that sometimes we can connect mental illness to certain experiences, our genetics, and so on, and sometimes it seems to appear all on its own. It isn't always connected to our circumstances.

Cora

Factors: Cora has a mental illness that has been diagnosed by a qualified professional. Cora's worries about her physical appearance grew so overwhelming, they were starting to impact her life and change her eating and exercise habits. She also didn't feel like she was getting a break from her worries. Cora fits within "good mental health with mental illness" as, although she is experiencing big worries, she found ways to manage them and feels good about her life.

Strategies: She tried reaching out to others for support and learning new skills to help manage and challenge her anxiety.

Opportunities: This is an opportunity to talk about help-seeking as an important strategy to support our mental health and reinforce that mental health isn't just an individual responsibility. There are other people in our lives who can support us. It's also a good time to note that seeking support early can prevent problems from becoming bigger. Both formal (like a mental health professional) and informal supports (like her parents) can help!