

## 7.2

# UNDERSTANDING SIGNS OF A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM AND HOW TO SEEK SUPPORT

This module supports students to monitor and reflect on their own mental health and know when, where, and how to seek support, should they need it. Leaving space for students to think about and understand their own unique range of feelings and expressions is an important building block for knowing themselves, and in turn knowing when to seek support.

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

**Note:** 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.

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:

- How to notice and respond to changes in our mental health.
- When, where, and how to seek help (with a focus on community and individuality).

## 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 know how to identify when there is a change in my mental health and that seeking help is one of the strategies I can use.
- I know words I could use to ask for help, should I need it.
- I know different types of support available so I can consider what might fit for me, should I need it.

## MATERIALS

- Explore Mental Health: A Notebook for Grade 7 Health and Physical Education
- A computer and projector/digital display
- Scissors, glue (optional)
- Sticky notes/small squares of paper, or a digital equivalent (optional)

# Minds On

Knowing yourself ~ 5 min

**PURPOSE:** To provide students with an opportunity to notice and reflect on their range of feelings.

**NOTE:** We all experience different feelings. As you move through the activity, try to convey that a full range of feelings can be a healthy part of the human experience, rather than conveying some feelings are better than others. Encourage students to focus on their ideas, rather than comparing responses with their classmates. This is unique to each individual, and there are no wrong answers.

The extension My Mood Meter activity is not for the purpose of assessment. It is for reflection and discussion. It is intended to be flexible, with all students reflecting individually and those who choose to do so also sharing their reflections with the larger group.

**TEACHER PROMPT** "Sometimes we may think of happiness as the preferred emotion. But a whole range of feelings can be healthy and important in helping us understand what is happening in our lives.

While some feelings may be more comfortable than others, all feelings can help tell us what we like, want, and need. That's why it's important to notice how we are feeling.

Today we are going to take some time to think about feelings that might be experienced differently by each of us. Some are unique to us, and some are shared with others, but all are important and valid".

## INSTRUCTION 1

**Brainstorm:** As a class, look through the emojis found in the My Mood Meter activity. Ask students to identify the feelings they might associate with each emoji. The activity can be found in the student notebook. A slide has also been provided if you wish to view it together.

### TIP

Students may also have different ways of naming and expressing their feelings that may connect with their culture and identities. The purpose of this activity is not to create a one-size-fits-all list of feelings or bring students' feelings into line with each other. It is for students to reflect on their unique feelings as part of knowing themselves.

## INSTRUCTION 2

Now choose a few of the emotions and invite students to name whether they feel each emotion is a comfortable or an uncomfortable feeling.

### TIP

Some students may disagree and that's okay. Feelings are experienced differently by each of us. For example, pride - some students are comfortable embracing and enjoying this feeling, while others may feel uncomfortable with the attention given by others based on the action or object that is the focus of the pride. A variety of factors including faith and culture can influence the way that students experience feelings.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Invite students to complete the **My Mood Meter activity** found in the student notebook. Students will look at each of the provided emojis and place them along the scale of 'comfortable to uncomfortable'. Provide an opportunity for students to reflect on and share their thinking and process for their mood meter.

Encourage students to be thoughtful and take their time with their decisions. Reassure them that this does not have to be shared.

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

- Do you notice a pattern? Are there certain kinds of feelings at each end of the arrow?
- What do you think influenced where you placed the feeling on the mood meter?

## BRIGHT IDEAS

The emojis in 'My Mood Meter' have not been labelled. This was intentional. Students may interpret these images in a variety of ways. Consider taking time to discuss with students what feeling each emoji expresses to them. This is a good opportunity for students to see that everyone may not respond or interpret feelings in the same way. There are personal, cultural, faith-based, and other influences in terms of individual context and comfort.

## TRY IT!

Your mental health matters too! Consider doing this activity alongside students. What are comfortable and uncomfortable feelings for you? Where do you think that comes from? What or who do you think influences the way you experience certain emotions?

## CURRICULUM CONNECTION

This activity could complement learning in Strand A of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum - Identification and Management of Emotions.

**A1.1** apply skills that help them identify and manage emotions as they participate in learning experiences in health and physical education, in order to improve their ability to express their own feelings and understand and respond to the feelings of others.

## Action 1

### Noticing possible signs of mental health problems ~ 15 min

**PURPOSE:** To discuss the healthy range of feelings we all have, how to notice when uncomfortable feelings last too long, and when it may be time to seek support.

**Note:** A video has been provided to assist in this learning. View the video with students and engage in the discussion questions provided. The video has been prepared with pauses built in for this discussion. The discussion questions and space to take notes are provided in the student notebook.

**TEACHER PROMPT** "We just talked about noticing the range of feelings we all have, including those that are comfortable and uncomfortable for each of us. Now we are going to talk more about our feelings and when uncomfortable feelings may last too long, be extra intense, or get in the way of what we want to do. Knowing when our feelings are out of balance can be a clue for us that it may be time to adjust our strategies. One strategy may include reaching out for help from a school mental health professional or another caring adult".

## Action 2

Seeking support ~ 15 min

**PURPOSE:** To help students know when, where, and how to seek support, should they need it; to help them understand the steps to take, should they need support.

**NOTE:** This activity provides an important reminder that mental health is complex and shaped by a wide range of factors, including (but not limited to) genetics, brain health, and social, cultural, and environmental factors.

Keep in mind that available school and community resources vary across regions and may change over time. Additional information on supporting students is available in the Educator Guide. Learning in this module will be built on in grade 8 (**Module 8.3: How to Help a Friend – Seeking Support for Others while Caring for Ourselves**).

**TEACHER PROMPT** "In the video a student named Cora reached out for support, and it helped her feel less stuck. Seeking help when we need it can be a great strategy to support our mental health. Today we are going to talk about the 'when, who, what, where' of finding support, should you need it. Everyone's supports will look different. As we work through this activity, think about what might work for you".

### INSTRUCTION 1

Use the prepared **slide deck** containing **conversation starters** to have a class discussion about seeking help for mental health problems when they arise.

#### TIP

Throughout the activity, students may use the '**4 Ws**' **organizer** in their notebook to record ideas.

### INSTRUCTION 2

Each conversation starter has been provided on an individual slide. Share the first question slide and then **pause** for class discussion.

#### TIP

Leave space and opportunity for students to lead this process. Encourage them to share what they know. This will help you understand what students see as supportive, what information is familiar, and where there may be gaps in their learning.

### INSTRUCTION 3

Move on to the "answer" slide, which shares information related to each question.

## TIP

Students may reflect on which information they were **familiar** with, any **new** information, and any **additional ideas** that are sparked by the slide.

## INSTRUCTION 4

Repeat the process for each set of slides (the question and the response).

## TIP

Noting which slides seem to provide new information for students can help guide you as you move through the conversation starters section of this activity.

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

- What kinds of things could we do as a class or school to help each other feel comfortable seeking support for our mental health when we need to?

## BRIGHT IDEAS

Consider posting information about help for mental health in your classroom and around your school. Ensure that resources are available in a variety of ways, such as on the back of bathroom stall doors or electronically on a website or shared class platform. This allows students to access them privately.



## 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 sticky notes or other digital 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?
- What new resources did you discover? Did you find new people, places, or things to add to your circle of support?

### KEY LEARNINGS:

There are **strategies** that can **support** our mental health. Different strategies may fit for each of us. Different strategies may fit different situations, too, so it's important to **have a few options** available.

Noticing **changes** in your mental health can help you know when to use strategies that work for you.

**Getting help** when you need it is also an **important strategy** to take care of your mental health.

### 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.

### PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION

You can use this brief **parent/guardian communication** to share and continue the learning following student participation in this module.

# Appendix A

## CONVERSATION STARTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

**Note:** throughout the conversation, reinforce help-seeking as another strategy to support our mental health and well-being. It's a valuable tool for students to consider and practice.

- Create a supportive space for this discussion by promoting openness, understanding, and validation for students/families' lived experiences and acknowledge that what is perceived as supportive may vary across individuals.

**When** would you know you were having more than a bad day and it's time for more support?

- We all have bad days, but sometimes, we get stuck feeling a certain way and our strategies don't seem to help as much as they usually do. Our feelings are really strong, long-lasting, and have a big impact on our lives--like when they get in the way of schoolwork, friendships, or activities we usually enjoy. They can also impact what we want and need to do and our ability to enjoy life.
- When that happens, it can be a sign that we may be experiencing more than the usual 'ups and downs' we all face. It can be a sign of a mental health problem.
- Although each person experiences mental health problems differently, there may be common signs in addition to changes in our emotions, like changes in how we feel physically (e.g., feeling tired all the time or getting frequent headaches or stomach problems), our actions (e.g., not participating in things we used to enjoy or getting into frequent arguments with our friends), and our thinking (e.g., difficulty concentrating, negative thoughts about ourselves).
- It's important to know ourselves, tune into what is typical for us, and notice when it changes. Knowing ourselves helps us know when to seek help when we need to.

**Reassure students that...**

- Problems don't have to be big to talk to someone about them. In fact, reaching out early can keep problems from getting bigger. It's a great way to help care for our mental health.
- They deserve help and their feelings matter because they matter. Sometimes students worry the people around them are busy or experiencing their own sources of stress, so they don't want to bother others with their problems. If something is important to them, it's big enough to share. They don't have to handle it on their own.
- We all need support at times. Sometimes students feel they should be able to handle their problems on their own, but it's okay to bring in others to help, and there are people who want and are able to support them.
- You don't need to have symptoms of a mental illness in order to seek help. If you aren't feeling yourself, talk to someone about it!

If you think you might need help, **Who** could you talk to? Think about a variety of caring adults you trust in your personal life, at school, and in your community.

We are all unique and who we choose to talk to may be different for each of us.

Discuss with students a variety of options, both formal and informal, to help students identify supports that are meaningful to them. Note that when students are feeling unwell, they might consider first turning to an adult they trust. Sometimes, talking it through is all that is needed to start to feel better. Caring adults might include:

- Parent(s)/guardian(s)
- Sibling(s)
- Extended family member (e.g., grandparent, auntie, uncle)
- Family friend/neighbour
- Elder or knowledge keeper
- Cultural or spiritual leader (e.g., a Rabbi, Imam, Pastor, etc.)
- Coach or club leader

They might talk to an adult they trust at their **school**, such as a:

- Teacher
- Student support staff (e.g., Child and Youth Worker, Chaplain)
- Coach
- Educational Assistant
- Principal or vice-principal
- Front office staff
- Custodian

**Note:** Schools across Ontario also have access to school mental health professionals (e.g., social workers, psychologists). Students experiencing symptoms of a mental health problem can be referred for additional school-based support from these professionals. Learn more about the school mental health professionals available in your board and school, and the ways to access these services from your principal.

Remind students that if they aren't sure where to turn, or if they prefer to ask for help outside of school, there are also services available online and in their **community**:

- A cultural or faith organization with culturally responsive mental health supports
- A family doctor, walk-in clinic, wellness hub
- Kids Help Phone (text CONNECT to 686868 or call 1-800-668-6868)
- One Stop Talk (call 18554168255 or click to chat with a therapist)
- A local children's mental health centre

Invite students to share other ideas about the supports they know. This can help you identify where to share more information. Students have also been offered a chart of resources in their notebook.

## TIP

Students may suggest connecting with a friend. Friends can definitely support us, but it's important to ensure we also connect with a caring adult when further support is needed. Both can play important (and different) roles in helping support us.

## If you wanted to ask for help, **What** could you say?

There are many ways to start the conversation. Students might try...

- "Can I talk to you about something?"
- "Something has been bothering me. Do you have a few minutes?"
- "I've been feeling \_\_\_\_\_ lately and I'm not sure what to do about it."
- "Can you help me, or do you know someone who can?"
- "Could we meet after school?"
- "I need help with something."

Remind students that digital methods can also be used to reach out and may be more comfortable in some cases.

Invite students to share other ideas about words that might fit for them and to consider the **Student Voice** examples offered.

## If you reach out to an adult you trust for mental health support, **What** might happen next?

There is no one way to support a mental health problem. Mental health support can look different for each of us. For example, students might...

- Talk to a caring adult
- Connect with a support in their community
- Call a help line and speak privately to someone
- Learn new skills and strategies from a mental health professional
- Consider prescribed medication as a way to help

If students speak to an adult in their personal lives that isn't sure of the steps of getting mental health support, let them know there are people in their school who can help or they can call Kids Help Phone to talk things through and brainstorm ideas.

Remind students that:

- Each of us is unique, and different supports will work for each of us.
- Feeling better can take time. It's a process. Encourage students to stick with it. Their wellness is worth it.

## **Where** could you learn more about mental health and/or how to access professional support?

Ask students where they would go for reliable information about mental health. What options are they aware of? What do they look for when they are choosing sources? This can be an opportunity to encourage media literacy when it comes to mental health information, and to reinforce reputable sites/sources such as [jack.org](http://jack.org), [Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario Division](http://CanadianMentalHealthAssociation.org), [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](http://CentreforAddictionandMentalHealth.org), or [School Mental Health Ontario's student site](http://SchoolMentalHealthOntario.org).

The internet can be great for general learning, but it can also spread misinformation about mental health. If they have a specific problem or are seeking professional help, encourage students to talk to someone about their situation and what is needed to help (rather than, for example, guessing if they may have specific diagnoses).

For additional resources remind students of the QR chart in their [student notebook](#).

### How can sharing a problem help us feel better?

Connecting when we don't feel well can have many benefits. For example, we may:

- learn new ideas
- feel heard, understood, and listened to
- feel less alone
- have a chance to talk things through
- learn new ways to look at things
- feel cared for
- feel we are worth and deserve support

Invite students to share other ways connecting can help us feel better and consider the **Student Voice** examples offered.

### Reminders...

- There are people in our school and community (family members, faith or cultural leaders, teachers, coaches or others) who are here to help you feel well and there are strategies to help you feel better.
- There are mental health professionals in our school and community that can also help (social worker or psychology staff member).
- Problems don't have to be big to talk to someone about them.
- Feeling better can take time. It's a process – stick with it! Your wellness is worth it.

**You deserve help. Your feelings matter. You don't have to carry this alone.**