

Mental Health of Students and Parents

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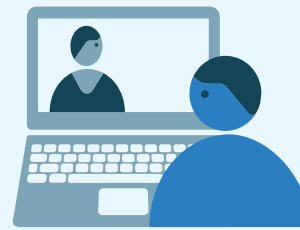
How School Psychology Professionals Support Ontario Schools During School Closures

School Psychology Professionals in Ontario School Boards provide the following evidence-informed Psychological Services remotely via **telepractice and virtual care** to students, staff and parents. Service delivery is **responsive to emerging needs** and is provided according to the Standards of the College of Psychologists of Ontario.



Support the continuity of learning for all students, including students with special education needs:

- Consult with teachers and administrators, students and families on supporting the transition for continuity of learning
- Provide strategies for academic skills, executive functioning, organization and study skills
- Support the transition for continuity of learning based on the student's learning profile and/or Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for teachers and parents
- Review and consult on external psychological, psychiatric and/or medical assessments
- Support and participate in remote Identification, Placement and Review Committees (IPRCs)
- Provide direct feedback of psychological assessment results (if testing portion completed pre-closure) with **communication of diagnoses** as appropriate, to parents, students, schools, and community services for programming recommendations and **access to service**
- Provide Professional Learning webinars for school staff on relevant topics related to continuity of learning, mental health and well-being



Continue to provide mental health and well-being supports to students remotely

- Support students, parents and teachers with **check-ins, prevention and intervention strategies** for mental health, resiliency and well-being given the changing nature of support required as the response evolves
- Help establish daily routines and balance for learning, physical activity, social connection and leisure
- Support students in managing stress/fears about not seeing friends and other forms of loss
- Provide strategies for emotion regulation
- Provide appropriate psychological counselling interventions through virtual care and/or refer to community services as needed depending on student and family needs
- Continue to work with School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO) to support provision of resources across the tiers, effective practices in virtual care and utilize training tools for providing remote mental health supports

School Psychology Professionals utilize their culturally reflective and responsive knowledge of child & adolescent development, along with their understanding of school climate & culture.



Provide support through Crisis Response:

- Support students and families with emerging mental health crises through virtual care and access to community services as needed
- Provide traumatic events support including crisis, grief and critical incidents supports
- Provide suicide prevention, intervention and postvention support
- Participate in VTRA (Violence Threat Risk Assessment)

Our scientist-practitioner training helps us to translate current educational and mental health research into practical School Psychology applications for Ontario students and schools.



Support the transition back to schools:

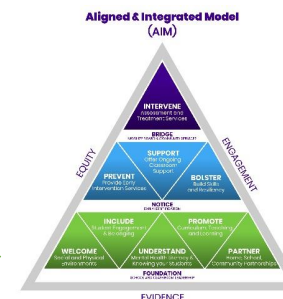
- Continue to proactively research, review, plan and update best practices for transition back to school
- Plan ahead to address prevention, intervention and follow-up of mental health needs due to school closures
- Create a strong proactive plan on how to manage the increase of anxiety and school refusal when schools reopen
- Participate in School Team Meetings to support students' transition back to school and develop, provide and/or support necessary interventions
- Support the development of individual student transition plans
- Prepare to expedite and prioritize necessary psychological assessments when schools re-open to address emergent and existing needs
- **Focus on working together, in multidisciplinary teams, sharing ideas and finding collaborative solutions within our Boards to support the return to school for all students, especially the most vulnerable, including those with special education and mental health needs**

Educator Conversations with Students and Families During COVID-19 School Closures

Setting the Stage for Virtual Engagement and Learning

During these changing times, educators may be reaching out to students and families to make caring connections. As we move towards classrooms without walls, boards will likely have specific questions to pose to families to work towards building readiness for remote learning through technology. These conversations set the stage for virtual engagement and learning.

At the same time, amidst the uncertainty and worry of the COVID-19 pandemic, this connection with a caring, significant adult outside the home can go a long way to enhancing a student's sense of wellness and belonging. Hearing from their teacher can remind them of the normal routines and rhythms of school, which may be reassuring and hope-inspiring for them and their families. And so, just like in the regular classroom, when educators connect with students they are also always simultaneously supporting everyday mental health. This happens through good (virtual) welcoming, use of inclusive language, promoting wellness and social-emotional resiliency, and supporting strong home-school relationships. See the *Aligned and Integrated Model, Tier One*.



Engaging as a “caring adult” is a role that all educators can assume. However, it is very important to recognize that **educators are not mental health professionals** and should not be expected to conduct Mental Health Check-Ins during virtual conversations with students and their families. Those with specialized training in this area, like school mental health professionals registered with a professional College, are best positioned for this level of connection.

If an educator notes something worrisome about a student's well-being during the learning-focused conversation, they should seek assistance, as they would if they observed something like this in the classroom. Educators should ensure that they are aware of current board protocols and practices related to referring to school or community mental health services. Having the numbers for Kids' Help Phone, local crisis lines, and child and youth organizations in your community is also a good practice.

Kids' Help Phone - Call [1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868) or Text CONNECT to [686868](tel:686868).

The ABC's of Connecting with a Student and Family Virtually During School Closures

Acknowledge - this is new, we are finding our way, we all have questions and we are in this together.

Bridge – teacher-student relationships from the traditional classroom to a virtual learning environment.

Connect – the student to the virtual class, reminding them that they are an important part of the school.

Through the ABC's, we have an opportunity to **reach out** to lay the foundation for learning in the virtual classroom, this new classroom without walls. A human connection and conversation, perhaps hearing more about a student's experiences and listening to questions students and families may have. **Reassure** parents and students that while we may not have all the answers right now, we will continue to be in touch as we learn more.

For additional resources and ideas visit the [School Mental Health Ontario](https://www.schoolmentalhealthontario.ca) website.