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# An Introduction to School Mental Health Ontario

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Implementation Coach

Nov 20, 2020



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## ABOUT US

# School Mental Health Ontario

We work together with Ontario  
school districts to support student  
mental health

Find us: [www.smho-smso.ca](http://www.smho-smso.ca)

Follow us on Twitter: @SMHO\_SMSO

Visit our partner COVID-19 Youth Resource Hub: [www.jack.org/covid](http://www.jack.org/covid)



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# School Mental Health Ontario Mission

To set the stage for consistent and sustainable uptake of effective and efficient school mental health promotion, prevention, and early intervention services...

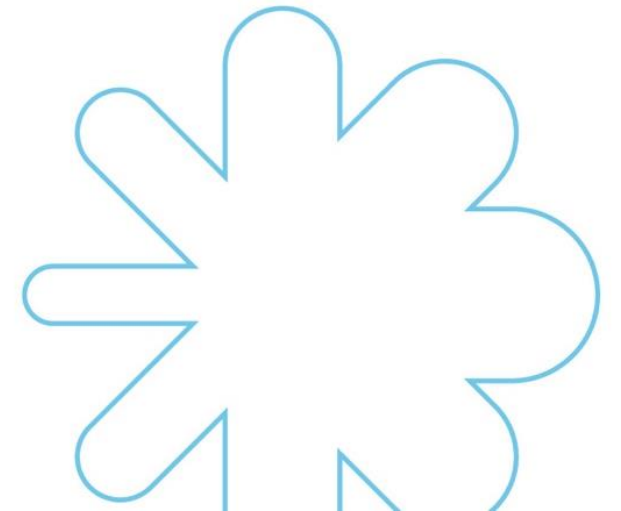
**so that students across the province have access to evidence-based multi-tiered interventions as part of regular school life.**

RESEARCH

PRACTICE



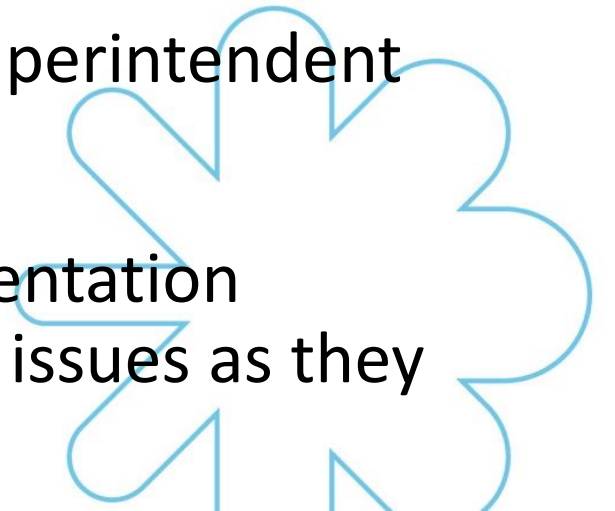
POLICY





## Did you know?

- ✓ There is a provincial strategy designed to help all school boards and remote school authorities with student mental health?
- ✓ Every school board in Ontario has a mental health strategy and action plan to support student mental health?
- ✓ Every school board has a mental health leader and a superintendent who lead the board strategy and action plan?
- ✓ Every school board has a school mental health implementation coach who helps with the strategy and managing tricky issues as they arise?

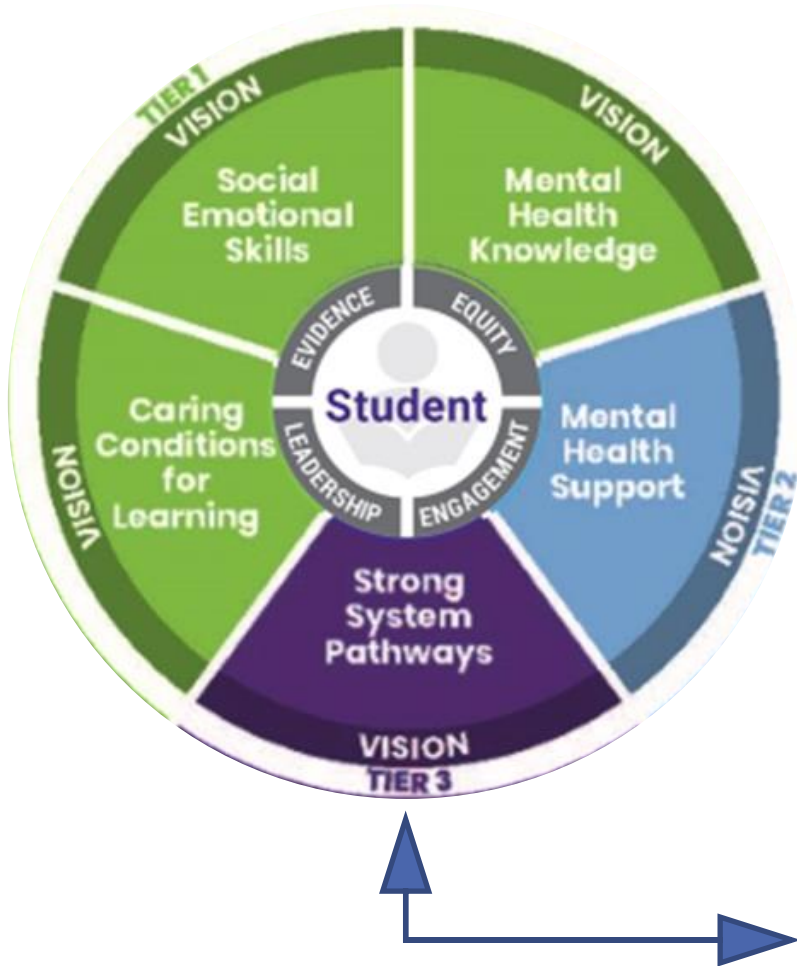




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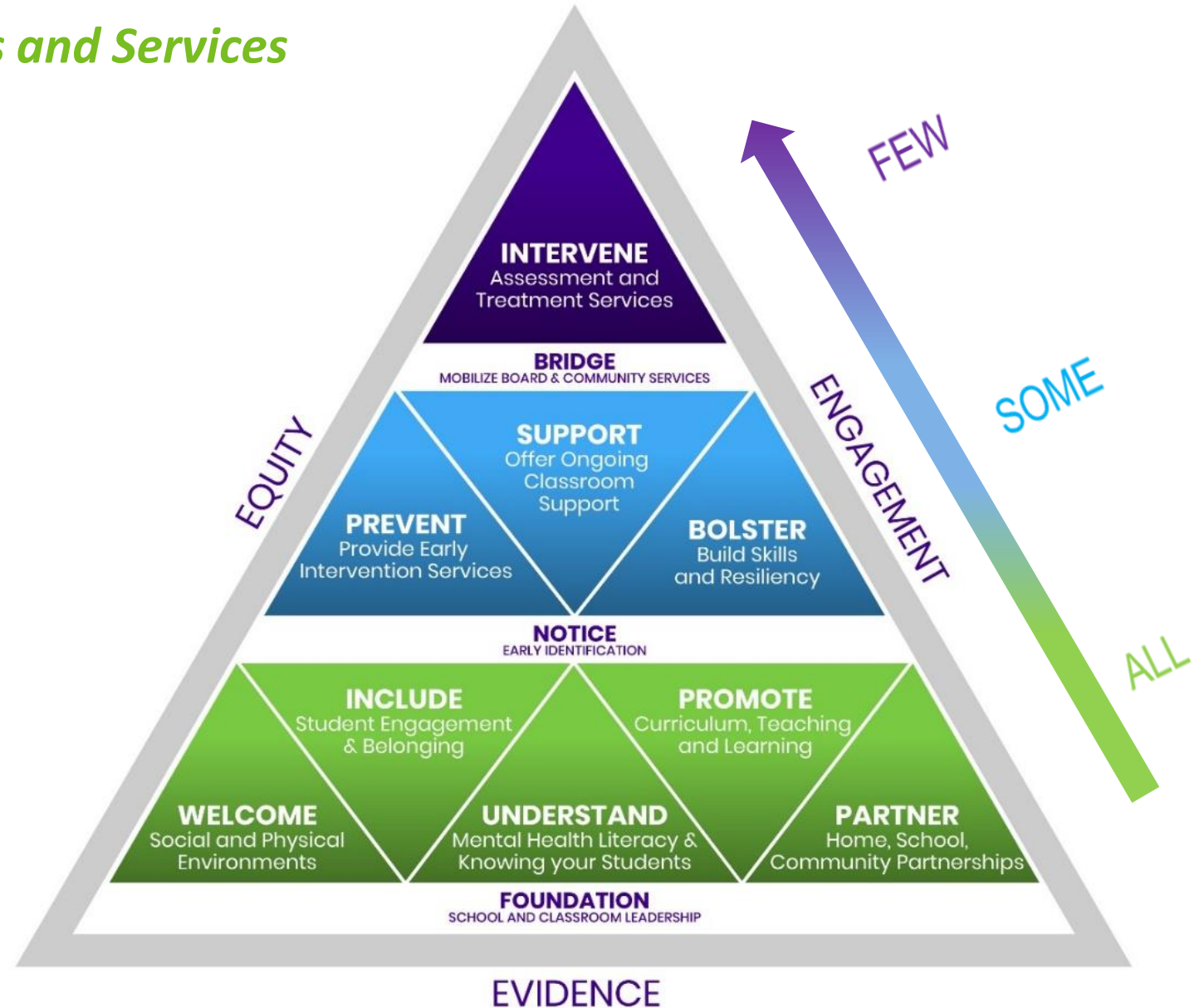
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## Multi-Tiered School-Based Supports and Services

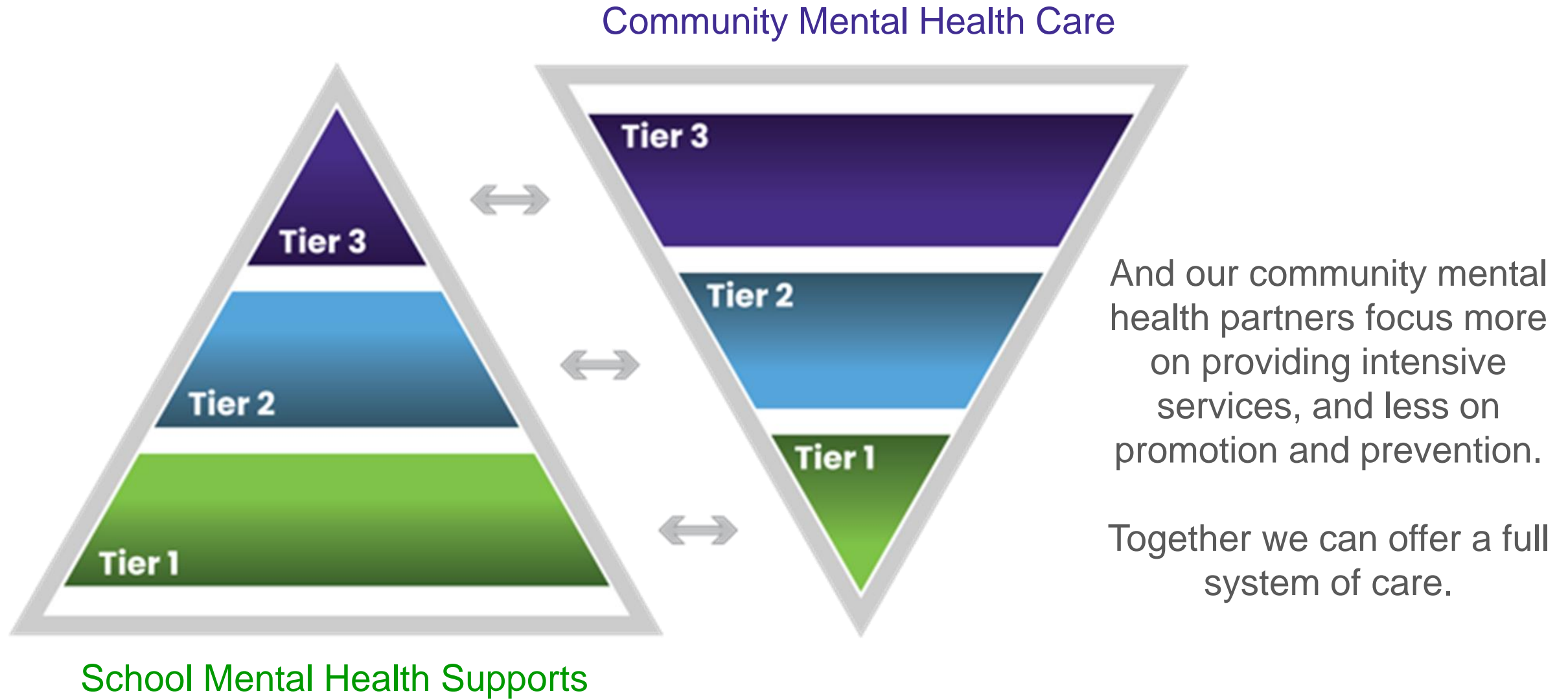


What do all students need?

## Aligned & Integrated Model (AIM)



# Working together as a system





# School Mental Health Professional Training and Support

- Designed to equip school mental health professionals for their role in prevention and early intervention during the return to school
- Training on virtual care and brief early intervention protocols that can be applied if there is a surge of student mental health need
  - Foundations of CBT
  - Brief Digital Interventions
  - Brief Intervention for School Clinicians
  - FIRST
  - Suicide Risk Assessment and Management
  - Measurement-Based Care



# BDI Training with Dr John Weiss | Harvard University

## 4 Brief Digital Interventions (BDIs) for Students: 4 Evidence-Based Ways to Improve Mental Health



### **Solving Problems**

- Problem-solving skills training
- Family problem solving



### **Feeling Calm**

- Breathing retraining
- Self-calming
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Deep breathing
- Guided imagery



### **Repairing Thoughts**

- Identifying and changing unhelpful, distorted thoughts
- Cognitive disengagement
- Selective abstraction



### **Trying the Opposite**

- Extinction
- Exposure
- Behavioral activation
- Self-control training
- Anger-control training
- Role-playing/modeling





# Mental Health Support by Regulated School Mental Health Professionals During COVID School Closures March-June 2020

- # of students who received virtual mental health services

Reporting Period	# of School Boards	# of Students
March to June 2020	72	41183



# Mental Health Support by Regulated School Mental Health Professionals During COVID School Closures March-June 2020

- **3 most common presenting concerns for Students seeking help**

Area of Concern	Board Ranking (# boards)			Total # of Boards who ranked this as a top concern
	1st top concern	2 <sup>nd</sup> top concern	3 <sup>rd</sup> top concern	
Anxiety, panic, worry	40	4	4	48
Isolation and loneliness	5	13	10	28
Depressed mood	1	16	4	21
Learning (and virtual learning) challenges	1	6	10	17
Family conflict	0	4	6	10
Social needs and concerns (food insecurity, family job loss, housing issues)	2	4	2	8
Loss and/or grief	0	1	6	7
Attention and concentration	0	0	3	3
Impact of racism and social injustice	0	0	2	2
Bullying	0	1	0	1
Other: behaviour regulation	0	0	1	1

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MENU

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# COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resource Hub


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Kids Help Phone 

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# Resources for Students

## REPLACING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

Sometimes it's hard to notice and challenge our unhelpful thinking. They are often **habits of thought** that can be persistent. Keep trying, it gets easier with practice!

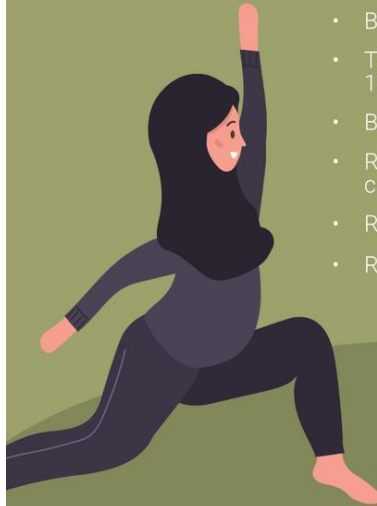


If you're struggling to come up with helpful responses to your own unhelpful thoughts, it can help to put yourself in the mindset of a friend. **If your friend was having the same unhelpful thoughts**, how would you respond?



## STRETCHES

- Sit cross-legged or legs straight in front on a comfortable surface
- Turn shoulders/upper body to the left and hold for 10 seconds
- Back to centre
- Turn shoulders to the right, hold for 10 seconds
- Back to centre
- Reach arms in front as far as you can, hold 10 seconds
- Reach to the sky, hold 10 seconds
- Repeat twice



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## WHY BREATHING EXERCISES?

When we feel anxious, we sometimes don't breathe as deeply as we should. These short breaths can be bad for our bodies and our brains and make us feel more anxious. Practicing deep breathing can help to still your mind, calm your body, and control your feelings of anxiety.

**BREATHING EXERCISES  
ARE A USEFUL TOOL TO  
CHECK-IN WITH AND  
CALM OURSELVES.**



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# Resources for Students



## SELF-CARE 101

Self-care is an important part of wellness. Take time and discover what helps you to feel good and recharge.

**EAT** We all need to refuel. But sometimes when we're stressed, our habits can change – maybe we eat junk food, or don't feel like eating at all. It is important to focus on eating foods that will provide you with the nutrients you need.  
\* **Tip:** Have a healthy snack nearby so you can refuel and avoid getting "hangry."

**HYDRATE** Try to increase your water intake and decrease your caffeine intake. Caffeine has been shown to create a stress reaction in your body and might cause you to feel nervous, irritable or restless.  
\* **Tip:** Drink a glass of water or milk before bed (but not too much!) rather than a caffeinated drink. This should also help you sleep.

**MOVE** Being physically active has many positive effects on your health. It increases your energy, enhances your immune system, reduces insomnia, stimulates brain growth and has been shown to decrease feelings of sadness.  
\* **Tip:** This doesn't need to take much time. You can get these benefits of being physically active from just a 30-minute walk. Stuck inside? Check out YouTube for brief yoga routines, at-home workouts or track your steps, and challenge a friend!

**ENJOY** Take time to discover things you enjoy. Do things that make you feel good as often as you can. It may not be what others find fun, and that's okay! We're all different.  
\* **Tip:** Maybe there's a book you want to read, a show or movie you've been meaning to watch, a skill you've been interested in, or something new!



## NO PROBLEM TOO BIG OR TOO SMALL

A help-seeking resource: for students by students

\* Need help immediately? Call 911 or contact Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868.

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## REACHING OUT

You might be thinking:

I don't think my problems are important or big enough to talk to anyone about...

I'm worried I might be labelled or that people might judge me...

Not at all! It's best to reach out and talk to someone. We all have mental health and talking about things is one of the ways we can take care of it! Asking for help can be awkward but you'll probably feel relieved after you do.

How do I start the conversation?

Here are some suggestions to help start the conversation:

"I don't know if you can help me, but I'm hoping you can help me to find someone who can."

"I've been feeling \_\_\_\_\_ lately, can I get your help?"

"I have a tough situation; it's really bugging me... Can I talk to you about it?"

"I can't seem to get past the feelings I'm having. I wanted to reach out before things got worse."

With difficult conversations, it may be easier to "break the ice" by writing things down on paper or through text. Reaching out to talk to someone doesn't have to be in person. For example:

"Hey \_\_\_\_\_, it's \_\_\_\_\_. Do you have some time to chat with me tomorrow? I have a problem I want to talk to you about..."

\* If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest emergency department.

You can also reach out to Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 or by texting **CONNECT** to 686868.





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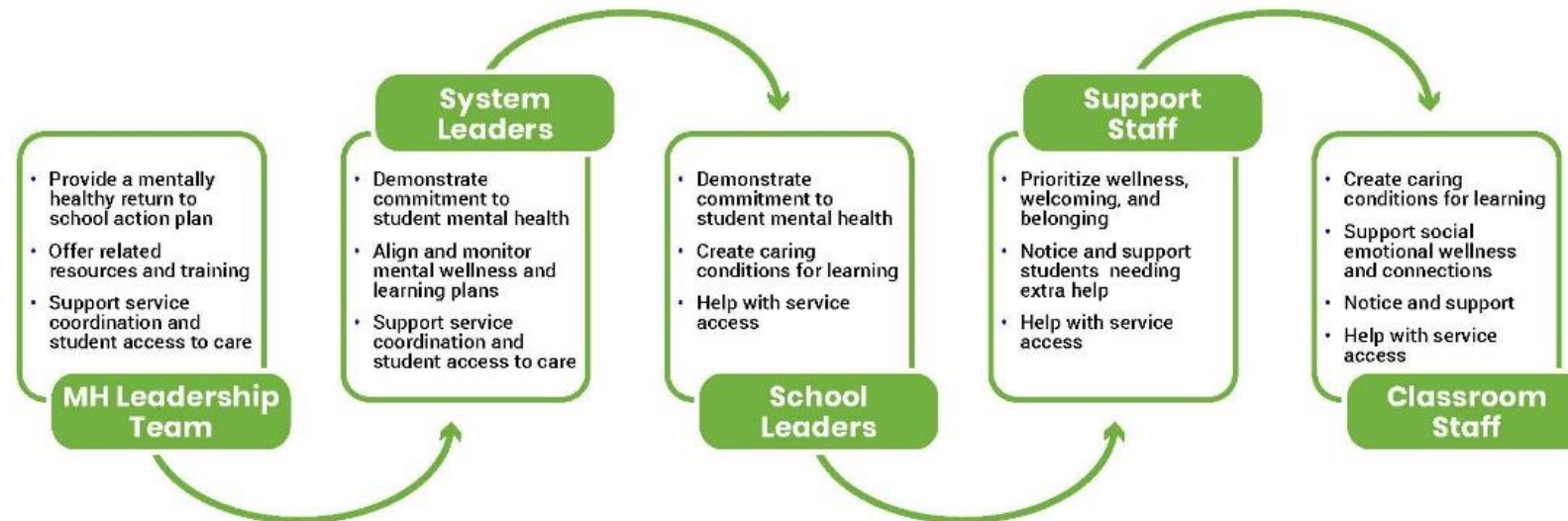
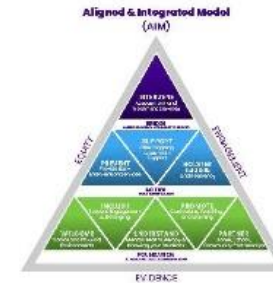
# Supporting Student Mental Health During the Return to School

*Practical resources to promote and  
protect mental health at school*





## Framework for a Mentally Healthy Return to School



### School Mental Health Professionals

Provide screening, prevention and early intervention services, crisis response, and pathways support

### Community Mental Health Professionals

Provide intensive mental health assessment and intervention services, crisis response, and pathways support



# System Leaders Resource Package – Sample Items

## Key Messages for a Mentally Healthy Return to School

1. Mental health and well-being is our priority
2. We need to lead with compassion, recognizing everyone has a COVID-19 story
3. Schools are an excellent place to promote and protect mental health
4. We have a mental health strategy and strong foundations to build on
5. We need to work together

Clear Communication 

Mental Health Literacy



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 Practical Tools



# Resources for Parents and Families on the website



## INFO SHEET

for Parents and Families

### Noticing Mental Health Concerns for Your Child

Individuals and families have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in unique and varied ways. For some, significant changes to daily routines, a sense of isolation and loss, and various other factors may have led to new or increased mental health concerns. Emotional and behavioural difficulties can arise at any time, and can affect anyone.

As families prepare for the return to school, it is important to consider signs that could indicate that your child is struggling with an emerging or escalating mental health problem, identifying problems early, and providing caring support, goes a long way towards prevention and/or worsening of difficulties.

You know your child best, and can notice changes in their behaviours or emotions. Right now, however, it can be difficult to know whether things you observe are just normal ups and downs associated with the pandemic, part of return to school jitters, or related to an emerging mental health concern.

Here are some ways to consider whether your child might be experiencing a mental health problem, and offer help. While we use the term "child" throughout, we recognize that your child may actually be a teenager or young adult. No matter their age, they are still your child.

#### How would I know that my child is experiencing a mental health problem?

Parents and caring adults may notice changes in behaviours and emotions that could be potential signs of a mental health problem. Ask yourself:

- Are these behaviours and emotions out of character for my child?
- Are they having a negative impact on my child's ability to enjoy everyday life?
- Are they having a negative impact on our family life?
- Are they getting in the way of my child's progress at school?
- Are these concerning behaviours happening more often?
- Are they more intense?
- Are they lasting longer?

Disclaimer: This info sheet is not a substitute for consultation with a regulated health professional. If you are concerned about your child, consult your physician or seek emergency services.

[www.smho-smso.ca](http://www.smho-smso.ca)

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#### Signs that may indicate a mental health concern for younger children:

- frequently changing mood/emotions
- easily hurt feelings, crying, anger
- ongoing temper tantrums, throwing things, hitting people, etc.
- ongoing sadness and lack of interest in things they normally enjoy
- withdrawal from friends and family
- increased need for contact and reassurance
- little motivation or interest in schoolwork, activities
- difficulty concentrating
- low frustration tolerance, irritability
- increase in headaches, stomach aches, other aches and pains
- decreased energy, problems with sleep or appetite changes

#### Signs that may indicate a mental health concern for older children and teens:

- outbursts of anger or distress
- frequent irritability
- feelings of anxiety and panic
- excessive worries and fears about the safety of family, friends, self
- increased defiance and opposition
- school refusal
- use of drugs and/or alcohol
- withdrawal from family activities
- withdrawal from friends
- ongoing negative remarks about self
- interest in activities from younger years
- declining grades, low motivation to complete tasks
- changes in eating and sleeping
- frequent talk about death and dying
- giving away possessions



## Mentally Healthy Return to School Toolkit

Practical Resources to Promote and Protect Mental Health at School



### Supporting The Mental Health And Well-Being Of Students Who Will Return To School Remotely

#### Enhancing Equitable Access to Virtual School Mental Health and Well-Being Supports and Services

As Ontario schools prepare to reopen classrooms for the 2020-2021 school year, in-person attendance for both elementary and secondary students will be voluntary. For students unable to return, opportunities for virtual or remote learning will be provided to support their:

- academic development
- social-emotional learning
- timely access to valuable school-based identity-affirming peer connections
- school mental health and well-being services and supports

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, school boards across the province have demonstrated leadership flexibility and creativity. They have quickly responded to the world crisis by adapting conventional in-school learning models to an entirely remote experience – online platforms, over the telephone, by mail, and even through individual home delivery methods.

As well, school mental health professionals learned to adapt to this virtual reality by reaching out, checking in and providing evidence-based supports and services for students and their families.

Unfortunately, for many young Ontarians the pandemic has had a negative impact on their overall mental health and well-being. This, despite efforts to mitigate the unintended consequences of [collective loss](#) due to school closures.

Students have experienced feelings of isolation, anxiety and stress due to stay-at-home procedures. Many have limited coping mechanisms. All faced reduced access to regular school routines, and daily interactions with peers and caring teachers and support staff. That has been difficult for all students, more so for students with pre-existing mental health problems.

<sup>1</sup> [https://oneynorth.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2020-05/U-Report\\_COVID-19\\_PoIL2\\_Resulhs\\_exte-mail.pdf](https://oneynorth.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2020-05/U-Report_COVID-19_PoIL2_Resulhs_exte-mail.pdf)



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## PREPARE; PREVENT; RESPOND



### A Suicide Prevention Guide for Parents and Families During COVID-19 and Return to School

Individuals and families have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in unique and varied ways. For some, significant changes to daily routines, a sense of isolation and loss, and various other factors may have led to new or increased mental health concerns. Anyone can experience a mental health problem, including thoughts of suicide. This guide is designed to help by answering some frequently asked questions so that you can prepare, prevent, and respond if your child or teen is experiencing thoughts of suicide. It has been adapted from *Helping Children and Youth with Suicidal Thoughts* created by the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and from a version further contextualized for school board use by Peel District School Board.

DISCLAIMER: This information is not a substitute for consultation with a regulated health professional. If you are concerned about your child, consult your physician or seek emergency services as outlined below.

Help is available for suicide crisis and prevention.

Call 9-1-1 or get support from a local crisis centre.

There is also:

Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6868);

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line (1-855-242-3310); and the

Canada Suicide Prevention Service (1-833-456-4566), that all offer 24/7 support.

For mental health treatment, free of charge, contact Children's Mental Health Ontario.



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Available at [smho-smso.ca/covid-19](http://smho-smso.ca/covid-19)



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