

The 6Rs of Connection — A Guidance Educator Resource (Revised 2024)

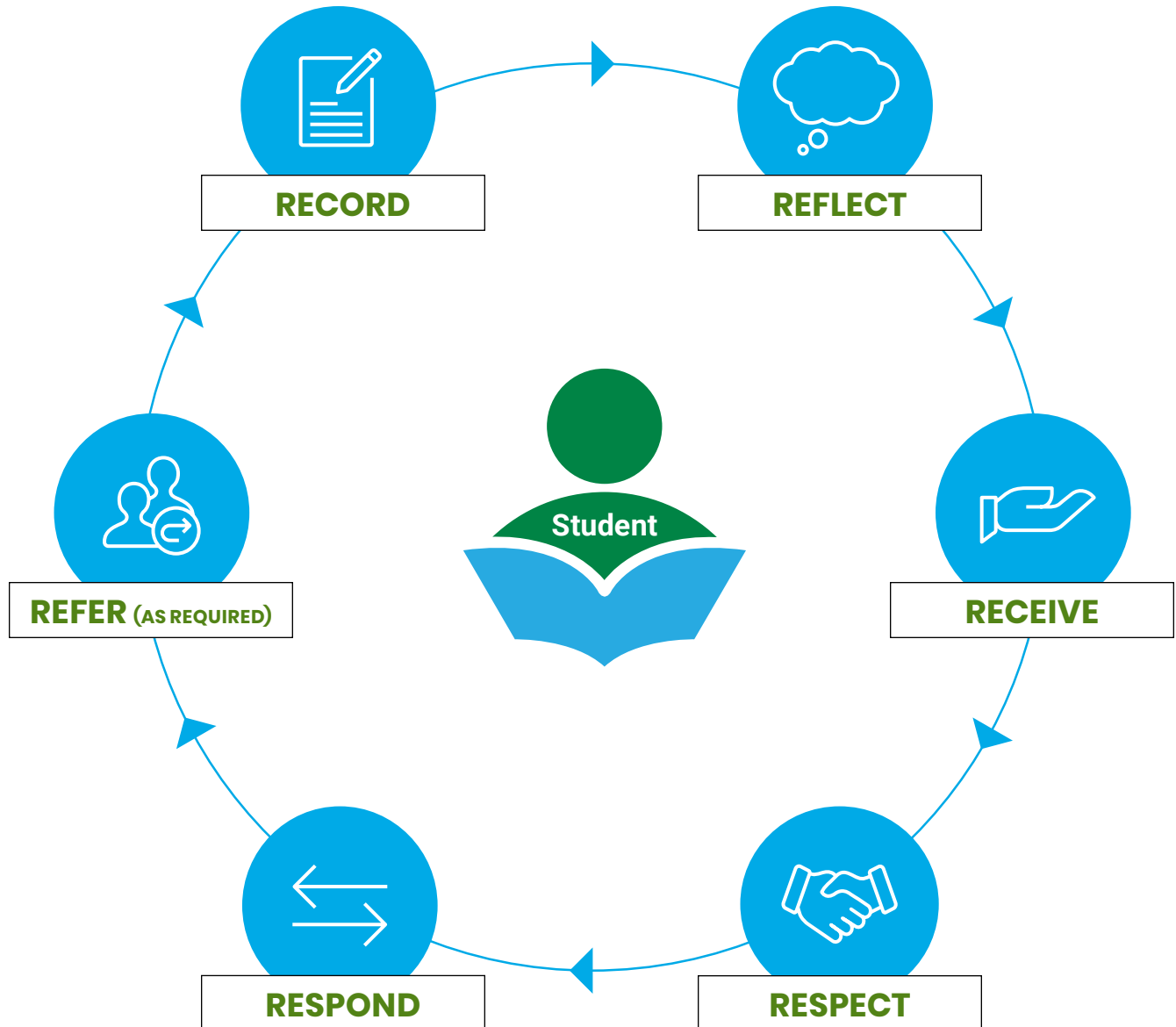
Often students see schools as spaces where they can find support as part of their help-seeking journey. In your role as guidance educator, you are uniquely positioned to respond to students who may be looking for social or emotional support. Guidance educators can help to establish a safe, identity-affirming space where students find a caring adult who can help them on their way.

Reflect
Receive
Respect
Respond
Refer
Record



The 6Rs of Connection — A Guidance Educator Resource

The 6Rs of Connection — A Guidance Educator Resource provides an example of how you, in your role as a guidance educator, can approach the way you support students who share emotions, problems or mental-health-related concerns. It won't necessarily cover all the student situations you may encounter but it could serve as a reference guide to support your practice. The 6Rs of Connection provides some considerations, talking tips and resources, as well as some reflection questions, adapted from the "Self-Reflective Framework to Support Students' Mental Health" as laid out in the Ontario College of Teachers [Professional Advisory, Supporting Students' Mental Health](#).



REFLECT

Reflect on your own thoughts, beliefs and biases before, during and after you enter into conversations with students. Consider how those biases may impact your interaction and understanding of what the student is sharing. Be mindful and aware of your power and privilege in the school community and consider how you might share that power and privilege to dismantle barriers and center the student's identity. Approaching the role of guidance educator through an anti-oppressive, identity affirming lens involves humility and an ongoing process of reflection.

CONSIDERATIONS	TIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educate yourself about how disparities in access to healthcare, education, housing, employment etc. disproportionately affect students who are Black, Indigenous, racialized or marginalized.• Pause. Reflect on your own thoughts, beliefs, values and biases.• Consider using the Cultural Humility Tool to support you in this process.• Be consciously aware of your preconceived notions and biases and how they influence how you are listening.• Be cognizant of your positionality, power and privilege (e.g. race, gender identity, settler status, socio-economic status, etc.).• Self-reflect on the discomfort you may feel by hearing and absorbing student messages, without immediately jumping to find solutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do I have a sense of my own ethnic, cultural, social, faith and racial identity and how this impacts my interactions with students?• Am I aware of the assumptions that I make about students and do I have strategies to pause and check these?• Do I recognize and understand how historical legacies like colonialism and enslavement continue to impact students' experiences in schools? <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural Humility Self-Reflection Tool for School Staff• Listen, Believe, & Act: Support for students who have been disproportionately impacted in schools• Identity-Affirming School Mental Health Frame

Reflection questions

- What do I know about mental health and mental illness?
- What are my personal thoughts, beliefs and biases?
- Do I use language that is respectful and non-stigmatizing?



RECEIVE

How you enter into conversations with students sets the foundation for your relationship and how you work together. Our initial interactions with a student may allow us to establish that we are a trusted adult who cares about them and will be here for them.

CONSIDERATIONS	TIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to understand, not to respond.• Be flexible about meeting a student in a space where they are most comfortable.• Consider how your verbal and non-verbal language helps to welcome the student.• Give space and time for students to express themselves; do not rush conversations.• Lean in. Look and listen for the range of emotions, body language, non-verbal and verbal expressions.• Limit distractions.• Determine the level of need in that moment for the student.• Determine if there is any safety risk (if so, move to respond and follow relevant school board protocol).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “It’s nice to see you today.”• “I’m here to help.”• “I’m glad we have this time to connect.”• “Thank you for trusting me with this.”• “Where/when would you like to talk?”• “I’m concerned about you, and I want to ensure I can give you my undivided attention. Would you be okay waiting for a moment while I move some appointments?”• “I’m just on my way to class but I want to give you the time we need. Can we meet later today?”

Reflection questions

- What tangible actions can I take to remove the stigma around mental health and make it easier for students to approach me or acquire the information they need?
- How do I contribute to an environment where students feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful?
- What can I do to support an environment that encourages caring, respect and acceptance and recognizes religious and cultural differences?



RESPECT

Respect that the student is sharing their emotions and experiences. Respect that students know themselves best and take time to listen to and learn from them. When you believe what students share, you validate their lived experience.

CONSIDERATIONS	TIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be an active listener; sit with the student in their distress.• Believe what students are telling you about their experiences and respond with compassion.• Resist any urges to minimize, dismiss or form judgement.• Support intense emotions by creating space for attentive listening.• Don't jump too quickly to problem-solving.• Ask clarifying questions.• Let students know that their experiences are valid and that it is okay to feel however they are feeling.• Be careful not to inadvertently negate or diminish their experiences or emotions by what you say or do not say in response to their words.• Pause and check your understanding.• Reflect back what you heard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "It sounds like you are feeling _____. Did I get that right?"• "Am I missing anything that you think is important to you?"• "I'm sorry that happened to you....that had to be so difficult."• "I can only imagine how hard that was for you." <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotional Validation Quick Reference Sheet

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RESPOND

Consider the broad range of responses a student might find helpful. Listening, validating, and empathizing are responses in and of themselves. If other responses are requested/required, they could take the form of problem-solving with the student, discussing coping strategies, responding to system challenges, etc. Any response should be co-created by centering student agency and voice.

CONSIDERATIONS	TIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and validate — no further response may be required. • Ensure that the student's wishes are respected and that they guide the plan of action they believe is best for them. • Act with and for students in support of naming and dismantling oppressions. • Assess the student's readiness to move on to coping skills or problem-solving conversations. • Considerations for problem-solving or coping skill strategies should rest on the knowledge, expertise and experience of the student. <p>If the student is not ready to engage, or does not need further support, redirect them accordingly — i.e. back to class if they are ready, moving them to an alternative space, or connecting them with a parent/caregiver or other caring adult.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Thank you for sharing this with me. I hear you don't want further help. I am here if you would like to talk again in the future." • "That sounds tricky. I hear you would like to talk this through. I wonder if you can tell me what's worked in the past for you?" • "What kind of advice might you give your best friend if they had this problem?" • "Would there be any further problems created by this solution?" • "It sounds like you're feeling a lot of different things right now. Would you be open to trying a few strategies together that might help?" • "It seems that you aren't ready to return to class. Would you like me to check if there is somewhere else you can be for the rest of the period?" <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ONE-CALL Desk Reference

Reflection questions

- Am I aware of the early signs of possible mental health concerns?
- Have I asked the student in front of me what strategies they have used in the past that have worked for them, centering the student as the expert of their own mental health?
- Is this student being negatively impacted by school practices and/or policies? If so, what can I do to address them?



REFER AS REQUIRED

You are not alone. Supporting the mental health and well-being of students is work we do in community. When supporting students, consider who else could be in their circle of support and intentionally work to strengthen those relationships.

CONSIDERATIONS	TIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask the student to identify who they see as being in their circle of support.• Engage and connect classroom teachers and other relevant school staff e.g., graduation coach for Black/Indigenous students, resource teacher, extracurricular coach.• When considering additional support for a student, explore all pathways, clinical support, school and community support, cultural, faith and family supports.• Referral pathways are most effective when built on student voice, knowledge and input.• Know your school-based mental health professionals and the pathways to their service.• Consult with and engage community agencies and other culturally relevant supports when needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me what is going on and how you feel. This is too big for the two of us. We need extra help.”• “It sounds like it might be helpful for you to access some additional support right now. Would you be open to meeting our _____ to hear about what they can offer?”• “I may not be the best person to help you through this particular situation, but would you give me some time to explore who else might be able to help? Could we meet again later this week when I have more information?”• “Who else in your life do you think you would like to talk to about this?”• “Who else, either now, or in the past, has been a support to you at times like this?” <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• My Circle of Support Student Help-Seeking Resource• Circle of Support and System Pathways Flowchart• No Problem too Big or Too Small

Reflection questions

- Do I know how to respond and who to contact if a student discloses suicidal actions or thoughts?
- Do I collaborate with parents, medical professionals and other community members as needed, and with the appropriate consent?
- Am I aware of my school pathways to mental health services and supports?



RECORD

Recording and making note of interactions with a student may be as helpful to them as it may be to you. When students are stressed or in crisis, it can impact their ability to retain information. Making note of your conversation, strategies discussed, and potential next steps could help keep the plan and focus moving forward. Following up or following through on next steps, future meetings, or commitments is an important part of building trust in relationship.

CONSIDERATIONS	TIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document follow-up required and any steps that you may have committed to.• Follow relevant board procedures for record-keeping.• Follow any relevant board policy or procedure related to issues such as child protection, violence threat risk assessments, concern regarding threat of student suicide, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Let me just review what we talked about today and what steps each of us have agreed to take.”• “Let me make note of when we plan to check in again — it is important to me that we get a chance to follow up.”• “Sounds like we have a plan but know that you are welcome to come back and see me any time.”

Reflection questions

- Do I keep my notes professional and limited to the facts, rather than making inferences?
- Have I informed students about policies regarding confidentiality and my duty to report?
- Do I know who to report to in an emergency, i.e. threats of violence or suicide?
- Am I following school policies around record-keeping and storage of information?

The 6Rs of Connection may be a helpful approach in supporting students. Engaging in a continual process of REFLECTING on your biases, assumptions, and privilege will help to ensure you are supporting every student. RECEIVING students in a warm and welcoming environment and RESPECTING their expertise in their own well-being helps develop trust and reinforces positive help-seeking experiences. RESPONDING with humility, attentive listening, and a broad range of responses, including simply listening, will help a student feel heard and supported. Your support and relationship may be all that is needed; however, REFERRING to a variety of culturally responsive and identity-affirming supports when required ensures that the student is receiving the most appropriate level of support at the right time. Finally, when you RECORD your interactions, it provides a tool to support meaningful and effective follow-up so that students receive support in a timely fashion.

