



MH 7/8 SUPPLEMENT

Considerations for Students with Special Education Needs

We are all different, but we all have mental health. Mental health resources and supports need to be tailored to the strengths and abilities of all learners.

Students with special education needs benefit from many of the same strategies that support wellness in all children:

- welcoming and inclusive school environments,
- explicit instruction in skills for coping and thriving,
- developmentally appropriate ways to learn about mental health, and
- a chance to share their opinions and preferences about belonging and wellness at school.

Further, because students with special education needs can be at higher risk for developing a mental health problem, an additional focus on mental health promotion and social emotional skill development in the classroom is warranted.

Source: [Supporting Mental Health Amongst Students with Special Education Needs](#)

All students benefit from learning about mental health and ways to maintain a sense of well-being and belonging. This is even more important for students with special education needs because, alongside their many personal strengths and supports, students with special education needs may experience risk factors that can negatively impact their mental health. For example, some students with special education needs experience ableism, marginalization, bullying, a lack of stable friendships, difficulty with daily living skills, less access to recreational/social opportunities, and/or academic struggles. For some, their special education needs may intersect with specific mental health problems or comorbidities. Developmentally appropriate mental health learning is one way we can support the mental health and overall well-being of students with special education needs. At the same time, we must also continue in our efforts to create and sustain mentally healthy learning environments that foster protective factors and build wellness for



students with special education needs. Your daily work in supporting inclusion, acceptance, help-seeking, participation in school life and recreational activities, academic accommodations and success, a sense of belonging, and hope for every student is a key part of this.

The following guide provides suggestions in how to deliver the Grade 7 and 8 Mental Health Literacy Modules so that each student engages in the learning at the appropriate developmental level in a way that is differentiated for them. As educators, we often need to adapt the content and the delivery of our lessons to help every student succeed. As with other subject areas, educators should refer to a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), if applicable, to best meet the needs of that student.

While we have made suggestions tied to specific activities within the student notebook many are applicable in a variety of contexts. Many tools and tips suggested for a particular activity can be used throughout the modules when appropriate.



STUDENT VOICE

It is important to provide opportunities for everyone's voice and ideas to be heard, including those using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

Questions to consider:

- How can I provide multiple avenues for students to share their ideas and questions?
- How are students communicating with each other?
- How am I capturing the learning?
- How am I sharing the student learning with parents/caregivers?



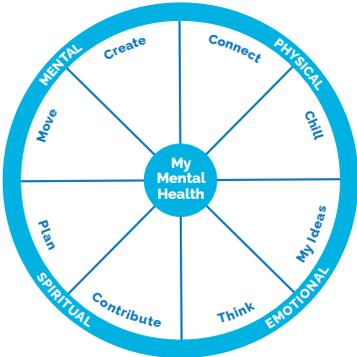
TRY IT!

All students, and particularly students with special education needs, benefit greatly when we model the use of strategies they have identified as helpful. Thinking out loud about why we are choosing a particular strategy and how we feel after can help make the learning more concrete for students. "I'm feeling frustrated," "I'm going to take a few breaths," "I feel a bit more calm and ready". Modelling strategies and language support your mental health too!



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3	<p>Minds On – Defining Mental Health and Mental Illness</p> <p>Throughout the modules the use of videos is used to share information and prompt student thinking. There are multiple ways of making the videos more accessible for students.</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • turn on closed captioning • slow down the video playback speed • have the video transcripts available to students in a digital and/or printed format • use the transcripts to pre-teach and/or review vocabulary or important concepts • use the transcripts to create multilingual vocabulary lists • chunk the viewing of the videos into smaller more manageable segments • if a student is a multi-language learner, consider pre-teaching key concepts in multiple languages to enhance understanding 



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4&5	<p>My Strategy Circle Students can identify strategies that support them in a variety of ways. They could also be invited to co-create materials and/or spaces that support their mental well-being.</p> 	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A drag and drop activity where a variety of strategies have already been listed. Seeking input and strategies from students and/or parents/caregivers to help create these options will help ensure they are relevant to a student. These could be written, or they could be represented using pictures.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students could be invited to create calming boxes or sensory bins to support a variety of sensory needs (tactile, visual, olfactory, vestibular) that are safe, age-appropriate, and developmentally appropriate. <p>Resource to try:</p> <p>Calming boxes - Stress management and coping - Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource - A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smsso.ca)</p>



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10	<p>Wrapping It Up – Reflection In many activities, students are invited to record their thinking. There are many ways students could record them.</p>	<p>Students could independently or with the help of an educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use assistive technology such as speech to text, text to speech, word prediction, electronic dictionaries etc. • answer questions orally • draw their answers • use augmentative and/or alternative communication aides • create a vocabulary list that includes pictorial representations, contextual supports and/or other languages that the student could add to throughout the modules <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;">  Things I learned that were interesting or helpful: </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;">  Things I learned that were surprising: </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;">  Changes in the way I think about mental health: </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="padding: 5px;">  Things I am still wondering about: </td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>We all have mental health. Here are some things that support mine:</p>	 Things I learned that were interesting or helpful:	 Things I learned that were surprising:	 Changes in the way I think about mental health:	 Things I am still wondering about:		
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13	<p>My Mood Meter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to label and identify emotions is a crucial skill in the mental health literacy toolbox • The Mood Meter activity can easily be adapted and can catalyze further social emotional learning 	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach emotional vocabulary using labeling, definitions, and synonyms, within the context of understanding facial expressions, gestures, body language or tone, and being mindful that emotion is expressed and named differently across cultures and lived experiences. • Consult with students and/or their parents/caregivers to help ensure that the emotional vocabulary in Augmentive and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices or word prediction software is meaningful to them. • Some students prefer cartoons while others prefer pictures of real people when learning about emotions. Adapt the mood meter activity as needed with pictures of real people or the student themselves. • Use stories, books, videos, or novel studies with diverse representation to introduce or reinforce emotional vocabulary. • Ensure communication visuals and augmentative and alternative communication aids have rich emotional vocabulary available. <p>Resources to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grab & Go Tools – See & Say How You Feel (smho-smsso.ca) • Grab & Go Tools – Feelings Flashcards (smho-smsso.ca) • Identification and management of emotions – Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource – A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smsso.ca) • School Mental Health Ontario Read Aloud – Visiting Feelings

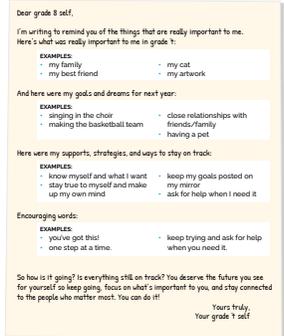


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14	<p>Seeking Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing how to ask for support is an important skill which also ties into self-advocacy. Activities or materials that help students with support seeking should be revisited often as a student's needs, abilities and strengths changes over time. 	<p>Students could independently or with the help of an educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> create social stories for seeking support role play seeking support create self-advocacy cards where they answer the following prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » How do I know when things are not going well for me? (Things that I do/ways that I feel.) » How could someone else tell when things are not going well for me? » What can I do to help myself cope in school? » If the coping strategies listed above are not helping, my next step is: <p>Resources to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-advocacy cards – Self-awareness and sense of identity – Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource – A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smsso.ca) Support seeking – Stress management and coping – Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource - A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smsso.ca) Class Conversation Starters (Handling Stress)



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15	<p>Wrapping It Up – Reflection Students greatly benefit from practising skills at home. The Wrapping it Up reflection activities can be a wonderful place to share strategies with parents/ caregivers.</p>	<p>Resources to try and share:</p> <p>Social-Emotional Learning Posters for Elementary - School Mental Health Ontario (smho-smso.ca)</p> <p>These elementary social-emotional learning posters align with the practises set out in the Everyday Mental Health resource. A set is available for secondary and for students with special education needs.</p> 
18	<p>Things I've Heard</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-teaching the vocabulary in this section of the modules may be helpful for some students. • Adding visuals to the slides to facilitate comprehension. • Simplifying the language on the slides to make the information more developmentally appropriate. • Reading the questions aloud. • Ensure students have access to the slides in print or digital format.



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19&20	<p>Letter to my Grade 8 Self Within the letter activity, there are opportunities to celebrate and share what is important to the students and what makes them unique.</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The letter could take many shapes. It could be a poster, collage, word cloud, drawing, story, video, etc. Provide multiple options to suit the abilities and interests of all students in the classroom. 
21	<p>Wrapping It Up – Reflection Students could consolidate their learning by creating an All About Me document that helps them build their own sense of self and identity while also creating a tool to self-advocate and share who they are with others.</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an All About Me document which might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » known stressors for the student » personal supports » what brings them joy » who they like to talk to » calming/sensory supports <p>Resources to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Mental Health Ontario Read Aloud – What’s My Superpower Self-awareness and sense of identity – Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource – A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smso.ca)

 **BRIGHT IDEAS**

Some students with special education needs also experience feelings of anxiety that may or may not relate to academic performance, speaking in front of groups or being overwhelmed by large assignments. Our [Supporting Minds Strategies at a Glance – School Mental Health Ontario](#) (smho-smso.ca) resource could provide strategies to support and bolster students with special education needs but also all students who need additional support.



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3	<p>Minds On – Understanding Stigma, The Power of Words Educators might engage students to discuss stigma related to abilities.</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> creating materials that dispel abilities-related stigma for instance helpful hints for using person-first vs. identity-first language <p>Supporting resource:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language Matters (mentalhealthcommission.ca) Inclusive language considerations (Canada.ca)
5	<p>Extension – Taking Action Within the “How do you want to share it?” section, students can be offered a variety of choices in how they want to share their message.</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a visual representation such as a dance, a song/poem, a poster, video, coding a simple game etc.
6	<p>Wrapping It Up – What did we learn?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This activity connects to how we treat others and showing kindness, compassion, and empathy. This is another opportunity to reinforce and practise skills. 	<p>Resource to try:</p> <p>The Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource has a category dedicated to Healthy Relationships Skills with a variety of activities that could be used to explore empathy, conflict resolution, being a good friend and acts of kindness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy relationship skills – Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource – A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smsso.ca) Healthy relationship skills – Faith and Wellness – A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smsso.ca)



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7	<p>Minds on – Understanding Stress Effective stress management and coping strategies are a protective factor of the mental health of all students but particularly students with special needs.</p>	<p>Resource to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress management and coping – Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource – A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smsso.ca) 						
8 & 9	<p>Video – Building Skills Through Routines, Relaxation, Reframing, and Relationships This activity is an opportunity to focus on the unique strengths, needs, and identities of every student. It can be a chance to discuss, collaborate and co-create practises that support all students.</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-develop routines and work with students to determine appropriate cues to support transitions so that expectations are predictable and well understood (e.g., visual schedules, visual timers, auditory cues and reminders, transition songs, tidy-up routines). • Provide advanced notice when schedules and routines change. • Consult with parent(s)/caregiver(s) about the sensory experiences their child seeks and avoids. Be curious about what works at home to reduce stress, avoid sensory overload, and meet sensory needs. 						
10	<p>Extension – Music Matters Some students could benefit from a type of activity that serves a similar purpose but doesn't rely on music.</p> <p>Extension Music Matters</p> <p><small>There are many different strategies that can help impact our mood and help us feel well, music can be one of them!</small></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">MY SONG</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <p>Things to think about...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this song support you? • Does it inspire you, offer encouragement, boost your energy levels, remind you of someone you care about or a meaningful experience, or something else? </td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>New songs for my playlist</p>  </td> <td> <p>Jot down any songs shared by classmates that interest you so you can add to your playlist later.</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	MY SONG		<p>Things to think about...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this song support you? • Does it inspire you, offer encouragement, boost your energy levels, remind you of someone you care about or a meaningful experience, or something else? 		<p>New songs for my playlist</p> 	<p>Jot down any songs shared by classmates that interest you so you can add to your playlist later.</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a visual board of images that inspire you, encourage you, remind you of someone, a meaningful experience etc. • This could be digital or as a scrapbooking activity that could be posted in the classroom or a space where the students can use it when they feel they need it.
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11	<p>Wrapping It Up – Reflection As previously mentioned, it is important to give students multiple opportunities to practise stress management skills. This activity may be a chance to present and practise a variety of skills in more concrete ways such as through videos.</p>	<p>Resource to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress Management and Coping Virtual Field Trips – School Mental Health Ontario (smho-smsso.ca) <p>The Stress Management and Coping Virtual Field Trips are a series of six lessons per division that support students' development of stress management and coping skills. Each lesson includes a minds-on activity, a pre-recorded virtual field trip session and a consolidation activity. Educators may be able to find resources within the different divisions to suit a variety of student's needs.</p>
12	<p>Minds On – Being a Supportive Friend Being a supportive friend means practising healthy relationship skills.</p>	<p>Resource to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy relationship skills – Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource – A Daily Mental Health Resource (smho-smsso.ca)
13	<p>Video – Share and Care, Connect and Respect This activity is another great place to practise healthy relationship skills such as words we use to support our friends or ways we show we care.</p>	<p>Things to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role-playing using the prompts within the activity. (e.g. what are some words you could use to show your friend support and start a conversation? How could you encourage a friend to connect with support?) • Co-creating stories with appropriate visual supports using the prompts within the activity. <p>Resources to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class Conversation Starters – School Mental Health Ontario (smho-smsso.ca) (Helping a Friend)





BRIGHT IDEAS

The physical environment can play a key role in making students feel welcome, included, and ready to learn. Things to consider:

- the sensory needs of the students (e.g. lighting, noise)
- accessibility of learning materials
- mobility needs (e.g. can students, educators, and visitors easily move to all areas of the learning space)
- collaboration and proximity (e.g. are all students able to easily communicate and collaborate with their peer group)

Enhancing your learning

The educator guide that accompanies the modules can help you deepen your learning and prepare to teach about mental health. Below is an additional resource to help you address the needs of every student when delivering the modules.

[SMH-ON • Supporting Mental Wellness Amongst Students with Special Education Needs](https://smho-smsso.ca) (smho-smsso.ca)

