



School
Mental Health
Ontario

Santé mentale
en milieu scolaire
Ontario

A guide to allyship as an affirming adult



Validate students' feelings

Students are constantly evaluating whether their school environment is safe and supportive for them. It is a privilege to be entrusted with a student's feelings and experiences, and it gives you an important opportunity to provide support. Remind students that their identities deserve respect and that their feelings are valid.



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Ask yourself:

- How can I create a safe and comfortable environment for students to share about themselves?
- How can I put my feelings aside to focus on the feelings of students?
- Am I familiar with tools and resources that I can share with students?
- Do I know our school's pathways to additional mental health support if needed?

Remind yourself:

- One of the most important steps in this process is to validate the student's feelings and experiences.
- You have an important role to play in ensuring that students feel safe and supported at school. It may be the only place they feel safe expressing themselves.





Build a network for students



Being part of a supportive community is an integral part of a student's life. Do research on how to create safe spaces for 2S/LGBTQIA+ students and center your learning around listening and paying attention to student's experiences.



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Ask yourself:

- How can I be a caring and affirming adult for students?
- How can I create opportunities throughout my day to connect with students?
- Who are other safe/affirming adults that I can refer to while supporting students?
- What programs or groups could be created for students to engage with at school?

Remind yourself:

- You can help students feel safe and take pride in their identities by creating opportunities for them to access supportive spaces at school.
- You are not only a bridge, but you can also co-create spaces with students.





Support student leadership and engagement

Meaningful student engagement at school is a primary protective factor for students' overall well-being. Often, students' desires for advocacy and change are centered around personal interests and/or experiences, such as mental health promotion.





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Ask yourself:

- How can I connect students with opportunities for advocacy?
- How am I ensuring that student perspectives and identities are being centered?
- How can I ensure that students feel as safe and supported as possible during their advocacy efforts?

Remind yourself:

- Practice and model self-care when advocating for students' rights by fostering everyday mental health practices as well as reconnecting with your own coping strategies.
- Remind yourself that advocacy work is collective work: we can rely on others in our school board or community for support during the process.





Research 2S/LGBTQIA+ resources outside of school communities



In addition to having a safe community at school, it is also important for students to be part of safe communities outside of school. This supports students in widening their network, activities and interests and supports their overall well-being. Familiarize yourself with local resources, clubs, and 2S/LGBTQIA+ events to share with students and encourage participation.



Ask yourself:

- What resources do I already know of?
- How can I deepen my knowledge of 2S/LGBTQIA+ resources in my community?

Remind yourself:

- You are not expected to know every resource or opportunity available. By engaging in a routine practice and/or building relationships with existing community partners, you can make your search feel more manageable.
- Remember that there will be some students who are well connected to local community resources and interested in sharing resources with their peers.

