

Starting the school year with...

# Connection, Community and Calm



**“Start with connection and relationship, mental health will follow.”**

— Advice to educators from **Lillian**, Ontario grade 12 student and member of ThriveSMH

As we return to school, prioritizing mental health and well-being is essential. Strong connections (relationships), a sense of community and belonging, and access to a range of calming strategies (as well as the space to use strategies that already work for students) can support a smooth transition. As educators, we know student mental health and well-being are foundational to learning. When students feel welcome and included, they are more likely to experience a sense of wellness and belonging and be ready to engage in all that school has to offer.

## Reflection and preparation

As we prepare to start the school year, think intentionally about how to promote connection, community and calm.

### REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

#### Cultural Humility Self-Reflection Tool for School Staff

This self-reflection tool has been designed to help you to explore, and then reflect upon, your individual cultural identity and how it may impact your work. The self-reflection tool prompts you to consider your skills, knowledge and self-awareness when working with students and engaging with parents/caregivers and colleagues who don't share your culture and abilities. Reflecting deeply on your own personal values, beliefs and biases is an important step in being able to work effectively with students and colleagues. Reflecting on your own cultural identity and how it may impact your work is an important step in being able to work effectively with students and colleagues.

#### What is Cultural Humility?

Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection and self-examination that allows you to understand your own cultural identity and how it may impact your work. It is a process of self-reflection and self-examination that allows you to understand your own cultural identity and how it may impact your work. It is a process of self-reflection and self-examination that allows you to understand your own cultural identity and how it may impact your work.

Reflect on your social location and biases and how they may impact your work. Consider how self-awareness can enhance identity-affirming support for every student.

**Suggested resource:** [Cultural Humility Tool](#)

#### Reflection Tool for Educators

Guiding Questions for Building a Mentally Healthy Classroom Community

#### What is this?

This reflection tool is designed to help you to explore, and then reflect upon, your individual cultural identity and how it may impact your work. The self-reflection tool prompts you to consider your skills, knowledge and self-awareness when working with students and engaging with parents/caregivers and colleagues who don't share your culture and abilities. Reflecting deeply on your own personal values, beliefs and biases is an important step in being able to work effectively with students and colleagues. Reflecting on your own cultural identity and how it may impact your work is an important step in being able to work effectively with students and colleagues.

#### Why might I find it helpful?

This reflection tool is designed to help you to explore, and then reflect upon, your individual cultural identity and how it may impact your work. The self-reflection tool prompts you to consider your skills, knowledge and self-awareness when working with students and engaging with parents/caregivers and colleagues who don't share your culture and abilities. Reflecting deeply on your own personal values, beliefs and biases is an important step in being able to work effectively with students and colleagues. Reflecting on your own cultural identity and how it may impact your work is an important step in being able to work effectively with students and colleagues.

#### How is this tool organized?

This reflection tool is designed to help you to explore, and then reflect upon, your individual cultural identity and how it may impact your work. The self-reflection tool prompts you to consider your skills, knowledge and self-awareness when working with students and engaging with parents/caregivers and colleagues who don't share your culture and abilities. Reflecting deeply on your own personal values, beliefs and biases is an important step in being able to work effectively with students and colleagues. Reflecting on your own cultural identity and how it may impact your work is an important step in being able to work effectively with students and colleagues.

Reflect on your practices explicitly and intentionally and consider the role you play in co-creating a welcoming, inclusive classroom environment. For example:

- ensure classroom materials reflect a diversity of identities, cultures and communities
- invite students to participate in decisions about what works best for them
- include and value parents/caregivers

**Suggested resource:** [Mentally Healthy Classroom Reflection Tool](#)



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## Tools to help

Promoting connection, community and the use of calming strategies doesn't have to be complicated. It can be woven into routines, connected to curriculum and included in everyday learning opportunities. Everything from a quick check-in to caring conversations, building coping skills and supporting connections makes a difference—and there are a variety of tools to help.

Here is a practical set of activities in a student-facing [slide deck](#) format. It includes:



ACTIVITIES	
	<p><b>Activities to build relationships</b>, get to know each other and get students thinking about their preferences, skills, talents and strengths. This can help create a caring <b>connection</b> and show interest in students' unique identities. It can also provide students with an opportunity to share about themselves, build a sense of <b>community</b> as you learn about each other and reflect on activities and interests that support their well-being.</p>
	
	<p><b>Calming strategies</b> are things we can do to help our minds and bodies feel more steady, focused and balanced—especially during times of stress or overwhelm. Everyone feels calm in different ways. For some, calm feels quiet; for others, it feels energized and active. What's important is that students are supported to recognize what works for them, and that schools create environments where all forms of healthy self-regulation are respected, welcomed and encouraged.</p>

There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Different strategies work in different grades, with different students and at different stages of development. These slides are intended to offer options and spark ideas. As you review them, choose what works best for your class. Consider students in your classroom and their varied identities and experiences. **Is there anything you would add or adapt from a cultural, identity or faith perspective?**

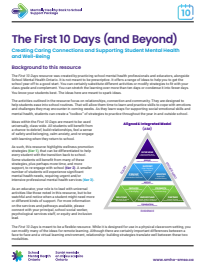
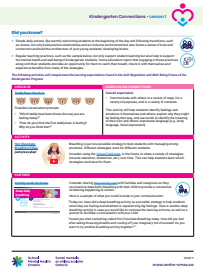


**“A community is where you feel at home.”**

— Nimkiins/Connor Lafortune. From: [Life Promotion Toolkit by Indigenous Youth](#)



## Additional resources

Additional resources to create community, connection and calm in your classroom:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	
	<p><a href="#">The First Ten Days (and Beyond)</a> offers a range of activities to help start the school year or reestablish connections following a break. The activities are adaptable for students of all ages and are meant to help create a welcoming and identity-affirming learning environment.</p>
	<p><a href="#">Kindergarten Connections</a> offers brief mental health promotion activities that can be integrated into daily learning. They include built-in ideas and communication to share with parents and caregivers.</p>
	<p><a href="#">Start Well</a> offers five days of ready-to-use learning activities designed to promote connection and calm in an elementary classroom. These quick activities can be used at the start of a school day or following a transition.</p>
	<p><a href="#">Wayfinder</a> helps educators take the guesswork out of mental health promotion and literacy planning through a sequenced guide to a variety of mental health lessons and activities organized by grade (K – 12).</p>

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