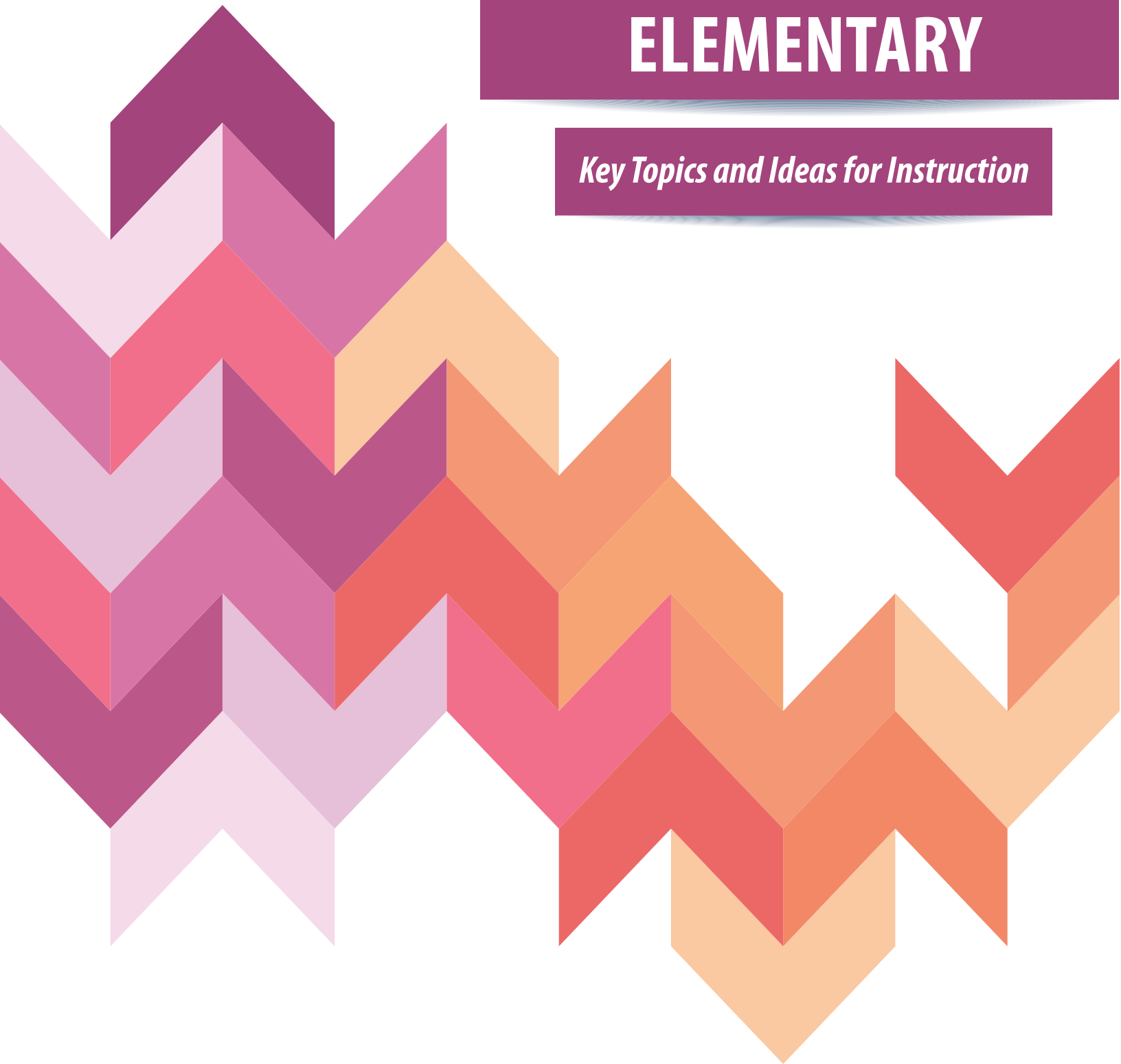


Supporting Student Health

ELEMENTARY

Key Topics and Ideas for Instruction



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Introduction

The provincial curriculum has brought together physical education and health education in order to develop all aspects of well-being and emphasize the connections between physical, intellectual, mental, and social health. This approach promotes a deeper and more holistic understanding of overall health and well-being in students.

While B.C. teachers have embraced a variety of different physical education approaches, they have often lacked the resources to teach health education topics with confidence. In response to the need for additional support for these critical health topics, the Ministry of Education is pleased to have worked with teachers to produce a guide to Supporting Student Health for elementary and secondary teachers.

This guide is not meant to be a step-by-step manual. Instead, it is meant to provide teachers with a useful starting point for teaching a variety of health education topics. It contains some general guidance on teaching health education topics, along with suggestions for teaching specific topics, including instructional approaches and how to respond to unexpected situations, which they can adapt to meet the needs of their students. This guide is also not meant to be a complete source of information about these health topics. While this guide contains helpful advice and suggestions for teachers, teachers will need to do additional research and development based on the needs of their students, community considerations, and other factors unique to their particular classroom.

As part of the comprehensive approach to student health and well-being, teachers are encouraged to treat health education as a regular, ongoing area of study rather than a once-a-year event. Many schools currently rely on presentations by specialist health educators to cover these important health topics. While this avoids the discomfort that can arise when teaching these sensitive topics, having classroom teachers explore them with their students helps build an ongoing conversation about health education. As students become more familiar with and comfortable talking about these issues, they may have questions that come up throughout the year that can't be adequately answered through a one-time presentation.

Having classroom teachers address these topics also contributes to the overall goal of helping normalizing conversations about mental and sexual health issues. One of the main goals of combining physical and health education is to remove the stigma from health education topics and promote mental and sexual health for students in the same way that we promote physical health.

A note on teacher well-being

Student well-being begins with teacher well-being, and it is important for teachers to take care of themselves in order to take care of their students.

The health education outcomes are an important part of the curriculum, and teachers can play a vital role in promoting student well-being, such as through directing students to valuable resources. While doing this very important work with students, please be aware of both your limitations as a teacher and your needs for mental wellness as a person:

- *Teachers are not medical professionals, and there are limits to a teacher's responsibilities.*
- *Be aware of your legal responsibilities related to referral and disclosure.*
- *Seek support for your own mental well-being.*
- *And be aware of the signs of compassion fatigue, such as indifference to the problems of others, isolating yourself, and feelings of hopelessness.*

General Suggestions for Teaching Health Topics

Getting started

- Rather than teaching all health topics in a single short, concentrated period of time, spread health topics throughout the year. (See Resources for a suggested timeline.)
- Send home a letter to parents and guardians in September outlining the topics you will be covering throughout the year. (See Resources for a template.)

- Whenever possible, meet parents in person to discuss any concerns and questions regarding a topic. Sometimes all parents need to hear is that the primary purpose of the curriculum is to protect and empower students.
- See the Alternative Delivery Policy to understand parent rights and obligations. All students must receive Health curriculum instruction.



- Incorporate Health into your regular scheduling and planning. Use this period to teach about mental health and sexual health throughout the year.
- Include comments about the Health curriculum in report cards to validate the importance of these topics.
- Find out if you have a colleague who is passionate about teaching Health and with whom you could co-teach, collaborate, or platoon.
- If another teacher covers Physical and Health Education with your students, talk to your colleagues about topics that they are covering, and supplement in your class.
- Introduce all aspects of health: mental, physical, social, sexual and how they are connected.
- Students will have different levels of background knowledge about these topics. Adapt as necessary and be aware of what is age-appropriate.
 - Gauge where your class is and revise as necessary (e.g., defining gender, sex, orientation, stigma, depression, and anxiety).
- Be aware of student diversity and adapt as necessary. For example:
 - Students who are English Language Learners will benefit from simple language and visuals.
 - Students with autism spectrum disorder may need additional instruction for topics such as emotions, social cues, and body language.
- Students who have experienced trauma may be triggered by some lessons in the Health curriculum. Be mindful of difficult subjects, provide advance notice of sensitive topics, and

monitor your students' behaviour throughout the lesson. Develop a safety plan for students who may need to leave the room.

- Preview videos and other content before showing to your students.
- If possible, plan your lessons before a break (recess or lunch) so students can speak to you in private if necessary. Remember your responsibilities around disclosure.

Disclosure

- If a student asks a question or says something that you think might be a disclosure of abuse or harm:
 - Find a natural way to stop the lesson and ask students to do an alternative activity. Speak to the student in private, show empathy, honour the student, and offer support.
 - Clarify the student's statement and get the essential facts (how, who, what, and when; avoid why) to help you decide whether to make a report.
 - Once you have gathered enough information, stop asking questions. As a teacher it is not your job to interview the student.
 - Take detailed notes as soon as possible.
 - Remind the student that they are not in trouble, and tell them that you will get them help (but avoid making promises).

The [Child, Family and Community Service Act \(CFCSA\)](#) requires that anyone who has reason to believe that a child or youth has been or is likely to be abused or neglected must report the suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker.

Learn more in the [Child Abuse Prevention Handbook for Service Providers](#), which has been revised to clarify reporting requirements regarding children and youth living in situations where there is domestic violence.

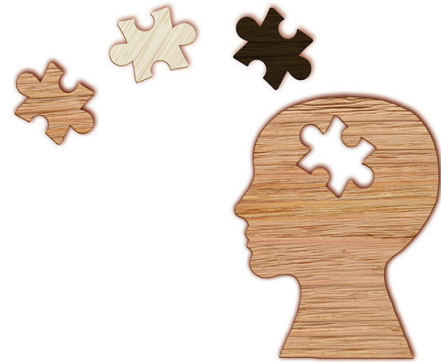
You can also find out more at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse>

To report child abuse and neglect in B.C., call 1-800-663-9122.

Supporting Student Health: Mental Health


Notes on language

- Introduce all aspects of health: mental, physical, social, sexual.
- Make the connection between *physical* health and *mental* health. Suggest to students that taking care of their mental health is just as important as taking care of their physical health because the two things work together.
 - Use this opportunity to discuss stigma as it relates to mental illness. For example, people aren't embarrassed to seek help from a doctor when their leg is broken; but if someone thinks they will be judged for struggling with anxiety or depression, it's like walking on a broken leg because they are embarrassed to seek the help they need to recover.
- Remember to model the use of appropriate language in your classroom and encourage students to do the same. For example, using words and expressions like "crazy," "just get over it," or "don't be so sensitive" can be hurtful and perpetuate stereotypes.
- Clarify the differences between chronic mental health issues and day-to-day stressors.
 - Discourage students from casually using expressions like "I'm so depressed – I didn't get to see the movie I wanted" or "I was so bored – I wanted to die." Remind students that this can be very hurtful for people who truly struggle with those feelings.
- Students can express themselves in many different ways. Be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure in relation to potential issues like student self-harm. If you have concerns about a student, speak to your school counsellor.



Daily classroom practices

- Create a safe and welcoming learning space.
- Use a Social Emotional Learning framework in your class. Try to create a sense of belonging and mutual respect among your students.
- Incorporate coping strategies in your class, model their use, and name them specifically. For example:
 - "Wow, I think the class is feeling sleepy this afternoon! Let's go outside and get some exercise so when we come back we will feel more focused."
 - "I am feeling frustrated because my projector isn't working. I'm going to take some deep breaths to calm down before I try this again."

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- “I can tell that the class is getting into the silly zone. What are some strategies we can try so we are better able to learn? Let’s try a mindful moment.”
 - If possible, create a “Calm Corner” where students can choose to take a break. You can also incorporate a “calm down kit” with a variety of sensory and visual tools like stress balls, fidgets, and so on. There are lots of do-it-yourself ideas online.
 - Remind students that these are tools, not toys.
 - Draw a correlation with someone wearing glasses so they can see and learn: some people need a tool to calm down so they can learn.
 - Don’t underestimate the power of physical activity. Incorporate strategies such various breathing techniques into your daily classroom practice. Take brain breaks. Move desks aside and do some movement, if possible. Allow students to self-regulate and get fresh air or exercise as needed.

Counsellors play an important role in supporting students’ mental well-being in a one-to-one setting. But collaborating with counsellors and having them do lessons with the whole class can also be hugely beneficial for students. Talk to the school counsellor about co-teaching – specifically about strategies for coping with difficulty.

- *All students may need to use these strategies to cope in times of difficulty.*
- *When all students learn these strategies, they may be more likely to know the signs of distress, ask for support when they need it, and support one another.*

Follow-up

- If you are unsure about whether to refer a student to a school counsellor, talk to the counsellor.
- Provide parents and students with specific instructions for accessing resources and support. For example, contact local health authorities to get current phone numbers and websites for resources, or show students how to get to the closest resources on foot, by bus, and so on.

Supporting Student Health: Sexual Health

Notes on language

- Use inclusive language, such as gender-neutral terminology and discussing sexual health topics in a non-judgmental way.
- Create a space where you model the language and attitude of consent. (See Topic: Consent.)

Daily classroom practices

- Provide the class with an anonymous “Question Box” and ask them to write questions **or** one thing they learned that day, without writing their names. Since everyone will be writing something, students will feel safe to ask. If possible, keep the Question Box available so that students can ask any questions that arise later. Remember that you can always revisit a topic at a later date if you discover a better way to answer a question.
- Don’t impose your beliefs and values on the topics covered (e.g., people must be married to have sex).
- If you are confronted with a difficult question, ensure that you have understood the question and they have understood the answer by saying: “What I hear is that you’re curious about ____” [Answer the question.] “Did that answer your question?” Ensure that their curiosity about a topic has been satisfied appropriately.
 - If students still have questions, or you don’t feel comfortable answering a certain question in the moment, say that they are good questions and that you will find good answers. Seek support and answer the question(s) during your next lesson.

Follow-up

- Provide parents and students with specific instructions for accessing resources and support. For example, contact local health authorities to get current phone numbers and websites for resources, or show students how to get to the closest resources on foot, by bus, and so on.

Topic: Body Science – Anatomically Correct Names for Body Parts

Considerations

- Become comfortable with the language; say the words out loud to yourself before using them in the classroom. And always use the anatomically correct names for private body parts with your students:
 - Two private areas of our body:
 - breasts (for all bodies)
 - genitals (anything between your legs, including the anus)
- Read children’s books about body science yourself before reading them aloud to students to ensure that they use current and appropriate language and information, and that they are age-appropriate.
- Teach body science before a natural break (recess or lunch), so that if a disclosure occurs, you have the time and means to deal with it.
- Send a letter home to explain to parents and guardians what health topics you will be teaching throughout the year.
- If parents or guardians have concerns and questions regarding the topic of body science, try to meet with them in person instead over the phone or via email. Sometimes all parents need to hear is that the primary purpose of the curriculum is to protect and empower our students.
 - See the Alternative Delivery Policy to understand parent rights and obligations. All students must receive Health curriculum instruction.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Explain to students that they are going to be scientists. Scientists are open-minded and curious about things and want to learn all that they can.
- Explain to students why we use scientific names:
 - “You might have heard a different name for some of these body part names, or you might use these words at home. It is important that you know the scientific name for the body part. If you ever hurt yourself in one of your private areas, it will be important to use the scientific name. This way, when you get help, the doctor, nurse, or family member will know exactly where you are hurt and how to help you.”
- Explain that male and female bodies have many parts that are the same (knees, eyes, arms, navel – point out that this is the scientific name for “belly button”) and only have a few parts that are *different*.

Body parts to name

- **Male:**
 - *testicles (males usually have two)*
 - *penis*
 - *two holes: urethra (for urine) and anus (for stool)*
- **Female:**
 - *vulva (what you can see when you look down)*
 - *three holes: urethra (for urine), anus (for stool), and vagina (where a baby may come out)*

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations.

- When a student asks a difficult question:
 - Clarify the question, answer it to the best of your ability, and ask if you have answered it.
 - Ensure that their curiosity has been satisfied.
 - Remind students that there is a lot of misinformation on the Internet, so they should ask as many questions as they need to.
- If a student asks where babies come from, explain that babies grow in a uterus/womb and that only people with one of these can have a baby. Babies do not grow in stomachs. If this were the case, anyone would be able to grow a baby.
- If a student continues to experiment with using the scientific words after a body science lesson (for example, calling out “penis!”), explain that it’s okay to use those words at appropriate times, such as during Health lessons, if you have questions, or when discussing a health concern. However, using those words repeatedly and out of context would be inappropriate behaviour.

Topic: Brain Science


Considerations

- Remember to model the use of appropriate language in your classroom and encourage students to do the same.
 - For example, using words and expressions like “crazy,” “just get over it,” or “don’t be so sensitive” can be hurtful and perpetuate stereotypes.
- Clarify the differences between chronic mental health issues and day-to-day stressors.
 - Discourage students from casually using expressions like “I’m so depressed – I didn’t get to see the movie I wanted” or “I was so bored – I wanted to die.” Remind students that this can be very hurtful for people who truly struggle with those feelings.
- Students can express themselves in many different ways. Be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure related to student self-harm. If you have concerns about a student, speak to your school counsellor.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:


- Teach the basic functions of the brain.
- Consider the age of your students when deciding which model of the brain to use.
 - One option is the “Flip Your Lid” hand model (Dr. Daniel Siegel):
 - Make a fist, with your thumb tucked inside your fingers. The thumb is the Emotional Brain or “Little Brain.” The fingers are the Thinking Brain or “Big Brain.”
 - Explain that we sometimes “flip our lid” (open your hand, exposing the Little Brain) and our Little Brain takes over (fight or flight, big emotions, no rational thinking or problem solving). We need our Thinking Brain to problem solve and calm down.
 - Brainstorm “Big Brain strategies” – ways to calm down and put the Thinking Brain back in control. These strategies (e.g., take five deep breaths, get a drink of water, ask for a hug from your parents, squeeze a stuffed animal or stress ball) can be represented by each finger returning to cover the thumb/Little Brain.
 - Have students choose their favourite four strategies and draw a hand, where each finger is a Big Brain strategy. Students should make sure that at least one strategy is something they can do while at school.
- Explain to students that the brain is an organ in the body, like many others, releasing chemicals that have specific functions, and sometimes needing medical support to function properly.

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- Discuss the following example with students (from Jennifer Katz, *Ensouling Our Schools: A Universally Designed Framework for Mental Health, Well-Being, and Reconciliation*, p. 125): “The pancreas produces insulin to regulate sugar in our blood. When the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, high levels of sugar build up in the blood. We call this condition ‘diabetes.’ Because high levels of sugar in our blood can cause damage, doctors give patients with diabetes insulin to replace the insulin the body cannot produce.”
 - When the body produces too much or not enough of a neurotransmitter or chemical, it may influence our mental health. Different people respond differently to experiences and sometimes when our brain has too little or too much of a neurotransmitter or we are struggling, we call it a mental illness, even though it is actually an illness just as diabetes is.
 - Use this opportunity to discuss the negative effects of stigma as it relates to mental health challenges:
 - Students with visual impairments wear glasses to make it easier to learn. Students with attention difficulties sometimes take medication or use different coping methods to make it easier to learn.
 - If you felt like you would be judged for taking medication for the flu, you might not ask for the help you needed, and stay sick for long time.
 - Some people feel that way about asking for help for their mental wellness. It is perfectly normal to use prescription medication to support mental well-being (e.g., antidepressants, medication for ADHD).
 - If appropriate for the age of your students, you might discuss healthy and unhealthy ways to manage mental wellness.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations:

- If, during a lesson on mental health, a student shares that a family member is depressed:
 - Show empathy: “I’m sorry to hear that, because it can be difficult. I hope they’re getting the help and support that they need.”
 - Remind students that this is one of the reasons why we talk about mental health, so that we can ask for help when we need it, and support our friends and family when they need it: “It sounds like your [family member] is being very brave for talking about their challenges and experiences.”
 - Remind students that mental health challenges are very common, but not something that a lot of people talk about: “Many people struggle in silence because they are afraid of being judged. Just because someone isn’t ready to share about their mental health doesn’t mean they aren’t going through a



difficult time. Remember that anyone can be struggling through a time of difficulty, but we can't always tell, because they aren't wearing a cast or blowing their nose, like they would with a physical injury or illness."

- Remind students that we should also respect people's privacy: "Some things we share with close family, but not with strangers. As long as they are getting the support that they need, we have to let everyone make their own decisions about who else they will talk to about it."
- Use this opportunity to talk about secrets: "If your friend told you they were feeling so sad that they wanted to hurt themselves, would it be okay to tell someone?" (Yes! It's not telling a secret if you are worried that someone might hurt themselves or others.)

Topic: Bullying

Considerations

- Create a safe and welcoming learning space.
- Use a Social Emotional Learning framework in your class. Try to create a sense of belonging and mutual respect among your students.
- Make the connection between bullying and consent:
 - Tell students they need to ask their peers before touching them (e.g., touching someone on the head, pushing).
 - Include “Do not touch someone without their permission” in your “class contract” or classroom rules at the beginning of the year.
 - Explain:
 - Sometimes consent is verbal (you use your voice to send the message) and sometimes it’s nonverbal (you use your body to send the message).
 - If you aren’t sure if someone is still giving you consent, it’s your job to ask.
 - Continuing to touch someone when you know they don’t like it is a form of bullying.
- Students often misinterpret any unwanted behaviour as bullying. It’s important to know the difference between bullying and single acts of aggression or conflict. Not all mean or rude behavior or conflict is bullying.
 - Introduce a definition of bullying:
 - Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour that is repeated over a period of time.
 - It’s hard for the person being bullied to make it stop.
 - Define the different kinds of bullying:
 - Physical bullying: doing anything that causes physical harm to a person or their property
 - Verbal bullying: name-calling, making threats, intimidation, telling offensive jokes (including jokes about race, gender, socio-economic status, physical limitations, etc.)
 - Indirect bullying: talking about someone behind their back, starting or spreading rumours, telling stories or secrets about someone to be funny or hurtful
 - Social or relational bullying: doing things to harm someone else’s reputation or make them feel embarrassed or humiliated
 - Intimidation: scaring the victim so they will do whatever the bully wants
 - Cyberbullying: bullying in any of these ways but via technology: sending unwanted pictures to a victim to scare them, sending pictures of a victim to other people to make fun of them, spreading rumours via texts and emails and social media

- Define “rumours” and “gossip”:
 - Rumours: a currently circulating story or report of uncertain or doubtful truth or a story or fact about someone that someone misinterpreted or made up, making it a lie; it’s usually a negative story
 - Give silly and serious examples: for example, “I heard a rumour that person A eats worms for breakfast!” and “I heard that person B’s parents are getting divorced.” Whether it is silly or serious, it can be very hurtful.
 - Discuss the divorce example: even if it were true, would it be kind to be talking behind person B’s back about their family?
 - Gossip: casual or unconstrained conversations or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true or conversations about other people, usually negative and usually about things that aren’t the speakers’ business, about things that are true or untrue, or that people have heard “through the grapevine” (not directly from the person being talked about).
 - Emphasize that gossiping is dangerous because it’s how rumours spread.
 - **Activity:** Play the “Broken Telephone” game to show how meaning can be lost “through the grapevine.”
 - Reinforce the idea that gossiping is not a kind behaviour and can have a negative effect on relationships with others. Nobody wants to be gossiped about and have rumours spread about them. Spreading rumours and being seen as a “gossip” can also make people unwilling to trust you with secrets or private information.

Warning signs that someone may be getting bullied:

- *Changes in behaviour, loss of appetite*
- *Lost or damaged property*
- *Self-harm, talk of suicide*
- *Complaints about stomach aches, headaches, etc.*
- *No longer wanting to participate in activities; wanting to stay home from school; avoiding certain groups of people*
- *Injuries, bruising, damaged clothing, or broken items*

Warning signs that someone may be bullying others:


- *Becoming violent or aggressive*
- *Blaming others*
- *Having extra money or new belongings that can’t otherwise be explained*
- *Having new friends who bully others*

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Discuss why some people engage in bullying behaviour:
 - They may be struggling with their own challenges.
 - They may be getting bullied themselves by a friend, older sibling, or family member.
 - There may be an imbalance of power or strength, or a desire for power (social, physical, psychological).
 - They may want to seem popular, tough, in charge, or cool.
 - They may want to get attention, or make people afraid of them in order to get what they want.
 - They may be jealous of the person they are bullying.
- Emphasize that while bullying is bad, every person has feelings and needs. Suggest to students that everyone makes mistakes, and people deserve a second chance.
- Discuss strategies for stopping bullying behaviour:
 - Talk to a trusted adult if you witness bullying or if you are a victim of bullying.
 - Keep seeking help until the bullying stops.
 - Be an “upstander” who stands up for others instead of a “bystander” who just watches when someone is being bullied
 - Do not take part in hurting a bullying victim.
 - Say kind words and be a friend to the victim.
 - Don’t be involved in spreading rumours and gossip.
 - Don’t spread rumours that you hear.
 - Even better, if you hear a rumour, say to the person who is telling you, “Really? Where did you hear that? Do you think that person would be okay with you telling people about that?” This is the only way that rumours will stop: If nobody sends a message to the “gossiper” that spreading rumours and gossip isn’t cool or funny, then they will keep spreading those rumours.
- Use the analogy of a fire:
 - If a small fire (a rumour) starts and nobody does anything to stop it, it will continue to burn, and could possibly spread (the gossiper will keep telling other people, because no one tells them to stop or sends the social message that it isn’t acceptable). Eventually the fire may go out, but the victim will still be hurt.

- If people listening to the rumour participate in the gossiping by adding rumours they have heard or continuing to talk negatively, it's like adding fuel to the fire. The fire will grow. More rumours will spread. The victim will get hurt even more. The fire will grow bigger and be harder to put out.
- If people listening to the rumour send the social message to the gossiper(s) that it isn't okay, and that they don't want to talk about other people like that, it's like putting water on the fire. The rumours stop. The fire is out. The victim won't be hurt anymore.
- Remind students that they do not need to tell the victim that someone was gossiping about them. That will just hurt the victim more. Instead, stop the gossip and tell a teacher or adult.
- Tell students that they can play an important role in preventing bullying. Remind them that even though teachers and adults can talk to students about doing the right thing, and provide consequences, in some ways peers have more power, because people care about what their friends and peers will think about them, which can provide a more meaningful consequence for lots of people.
 - If the person using bullying behaviour isn't getting any reinforcement from their peers (i.e., telling the person they are being funny or cool), they will usually stop the mean behaviour.
 - Have students practise saying the following:
 - “That isn't cool. I don't want to talk about other people when they aren't even here.”
 - “That was a mean thing to say” or “That wasn't very nice.”
 - “Let's talk about something else. We don't even know if that's true, and I don't think it's nice to talk about that kind of thing.”
 - Remind students that while they shouldn't “bully a bully,” it's okay to tell someone they are being mean if they are. Some people need to hear it from a peer to realize that they aren't being kind.
 - Tell students that after they have been an “Upstander,” it's still important to tell an adult.
- Remind students that those engaging in bullying behaviour are people too!
 - Sometimes bullying behaviour or gossiping is because the person has low self-confidence, they need a friend, or they need a positive way to cope with their bad feelings.
 - If one of your friends says something that's not nice about someone else, it doesn't mean you should stop being their friend and never talk to them again.
 - Tell your friend that you don't think it's nice, and they will probably stop. Everyone deserves a second chance. If they continue to be mean, you may decide you don't want to be friends with a person who acts like that.

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- Tell your friend why you don't want to hang out with them anymore, so they get the message that being a bully doesn't help you make and keep friends.
 - Don't forget that if your friend is starting to act differently, or mean, they may be going through a difficult time. Try asking if they are okay. They may need a friend now more than ever.
 - Have students ask themselves, "Do I bully others?"
 - What's a more positive way to get respect from your peers?
 - Talk to someone about your feelings, especially about how to cope with feelings of anger.
 - Apologize to the people you've hurt. They might not trust you right away, though, because they will want to see that you've changed.
 - Remind students that no one has the right to make them feel like they aren't safe at school.
 - Some degree of socially imperfect behaviour is normal. Not everything needs an adult response or punishment and can instead be an opportunity to communicate better ways to express anger or anxiety in more acceptable ways.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions.

- Remember your responsibilities around disclosure (see General Suggestions for Teaching Health Topics).

The [Child, Family and Community Service Act \(CFCSA\)](#) requires that anyone who has reason to believe that a child or youth has been or is likely to be abused or neglected must report the suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker.

Learn more in the [Child Abuse Prevention Handbook for Service Providers](#), which has been revised to clarify reporting requirements regarding children and youth living in situations where there is domestic violence.

Topic: Consent


Considerations

- Create a space where you model the language and attitude of consent.
 - For example, when helping students to resolve a fight, ask whether the person who didn't like the behaviour said "stop." If they did, say to the other person, "Stop means stop and no means no. Nobody should ever have to say it twice." If they did not say "stop," encourage them to use their voice, and if the behaviour doesn't stop to seek help from a trusted adult.
 - Remind them that just because someone doesn't actually say "stop" or "no" doesn't mean they mean "yes." This is applicable in many contexts and can be reinforced early and often (e.g., with "playful" teasing or pushing between friends, tapping someone on the head).
 - Sometimes the "instigator" isn't trying to bother the "victim." They may be friends, they may think they are being funny, or they may have another reason for doing what they're doing. Take this opportunity to ask the person whose behaviour was unwanted if it looked like the other person was enjoying it, or if they looked uncomfortable. It is the student's job to ask themselves if the other person looks like they feel comfortable and, if they aren't sure, to check in and ask the other person.
 - If you notice someone who is "bugging" another person, you can intervene and use this language. (You don't have to wait until they tell the teacher, as some students won't feel comfortable telling on a friend or classmate.)
- Showing respect to our elders is often a primary driving force/fear in children allowing unwanted contact to occur, especially when it comes to someone who is a close relative, family friend, teacher, coach, and so on. So make sure that students understand their right to say no to unwanted touch.
- Use the language of consent when discussing all kinds of topics, including touching, digital photo sharing, social media, and safe sex (grade-specific).
- If your students are the appropriate age, discuss digital consent with regard to pictures, videos, documents, and so on, including laws and the students' roles and responsibilities.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Explain to students that their body is theirs and only theirs. They get to decide who touches their body and who they hug, give kisses to, and hold hands with.
 - If an adult (parent or otherwise) asks for hug/kiss or asks them to hug/kiss someone else (family friend, aunt, uncle etc.), they always have the choice to say no.

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- They should not worry about hurting the other person's feelings. They can just say "No, thank you," offer a thumbs-up or high-five, or smile and wave goodbye instead.
 - Tell students they need to ask their peers before touching them (e.g., hugging, holding hands, touching someone on the head).
 - Include "Do not touch someone without their permission" in your "class contract" or classroom rules at the beginning of the year.
 - Sometimes consent is verbal (you use your voice to send the message) and sometimes it's nonverbal (you use your body to send the message).
 - Sometimes people change their minds, or may not feel like being touched at that moment. Just because they wanted a hug earlier in the day or yesterday, it doesn't mean that they want one now. Students need to get consent every time.
 - When someone signals that they want the touching to stop (e.g., by letting go of a person's hand, pulling away from a hug, saying stop), they are no longer giving consent.
 - Don't get mad or upset.
 - If you aren't sure if someone is still giving you consent, it's your job to ask.
 - Continuing to touch someone when you know they don't like it is a form of bullying.
 - Remind students that not all physical touches (hugging, hand-holding, etc.) are bad; in fact, they usually make us feel good!
 - When we have physical touch, our brains make something called dopamine that makes us feel happy and less stressed. This is why people usually like to receive and give physical touch. It's totally normal to want to hug someone!
 - As the person who wants to do the touching (which feels good), you need to look at the person you want to touch and see if they look like they want to receive physical touch. This can be hard, so it's a good idea to ask if you aren't sure.
 - If something that usually feels good, like a hug, makes you have a "no" feeling (e.g., an uncomfortable feeling, or a funny feeling in your stomach), then it probably means you don't like it and don't want to give consent. You should keep trying to make the touching stop until it does. (See Topic: Safe/Unsafe Touch.)
 - Run through some different scenarios with your class (adapting as necessary for age):
 - A friend wants to hold your hand at recess, but you don't want to. Is it okay to say no? (Yes. It doesn't mean you don't like your friend. Discuss)
 - You are holding a friend's hand during recess, but then you decide you don't feel like it anymore. Is it okay to stop? (Yes, it's okay to change your mind. Discuss)

- You are at a family party and your mom tells you to give Aunt Betty a hug or a kiss, but you don't want to. Sometimes hugging/kissing Aunt Betty makes you uncomfortable. What could you say?
 - “No, thank you, but how about a high-five?”
 - “I don't feel like hugging today.”
 - “That makes me feel uncomfortable. I don't want to give Aunt Betty hugs and kisses.”
 - Tell students that if they don't want to hurt Aunt Betty's feelings, they should talk to their parents in private and ask them in a strong voice to stop asking them to give hugs and kisses to family members.
 - Emphasize that while it's nice to be considerate of other people's feelings, and to usually try to be polite, you should never do something that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe in order to protect someone else's feelings.
 - Explain that in our society, we are expected to be respectful to one another. So if you don't wish to give someone a hug or even a high-five, it's still important to show respect.
 - As a class, come up with some other ways to be respectful (e.g., giving a wave, shaking the person's hand, saying goodbye and looking them in the eye).
- You run up to an adult in the school and want to give them a hug. Is this okay? (No, you have to ask permission to give hugs. Discuss how this applies to all people.)
- I (the teacher) am putting books on the bookshelf, you walk up behind me and give me a hug. Is this okay? (No, you have to ask permission to give hugs. Discuss how this applies to all people, even teachers!)
 - Here you could discuss how sometimes you can get “nonverbal” consent from someone. For example, if you hold your arms open to hug your teacher and the teacher opens their arms back, that's a signal of consent. If you aren't sure if you are getting consent, don't be afraid to ask!
- Explain to students that it is important to practise asking for consent, giving consent, and saying no. This helps students build resilience when asking for a hug and being told no or being the one saying “no, thank you.” However, it is important to distinguish inappropriate touch, which is never okay.
 - Have students practise asking for consent (high-fives, hugs, handshakes), giving consent if they are comfortable), and saying no.
 - Ensure that all students practise saying no in a strong voice. If students feel shy or uncomfortable saying no to their friends, offer them strategies like smiling and saying “no, thank you” or doing something different with their hands, like waving or giving a thumbs-up.

- Explain to students that they will never be in trouble for saying no to an adult or friend. The student decides what happens with their body and no one else gets to decide.
 - If someone is making them feel bad because they are choosing not to give consent, then that person is not being a good friend.
- Remind students that when someone is not giving them consent, it's not fair or right to get mad or upset. Treat others how you would like to be treated!
 - It's acceptable and normal to not give consent. You can just respond by saying "that's cool!" or "no worries."
- Explain what "bribes" and "threats" mean and that they are never acceptable. Here are some examples:
 - "I won't be your friend if you don't hold my hand."
 - "If you are my friend then you will let me hug you."
 - "I will let you have [ice cream, toys, etc.] if you let me touch you."

Discomfort

We often use the word "discomfort" with regard to a growth mindset and building resilience. Being "uncomfortable" can be a good thing if it encourages us to push ourselves and try new things.

However, it is important to distinguish this discomfort from the discomfort we feel when someone tries to touch us in a way we don't like. Students need to figure out what is the root of discomfort: are you trying to push yourself "out of your comfort zone" or is someone else making you feel uncomfortable?

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions.

- Remember your responsibilities around disclosure (see General Suggestions for Teaching Health Topics).

The [Child, Family and Community Service Act](#) (CFCSA) requires that anyone who has reason to believe that a child or youth has been or is likely to be abused or neglected must report the suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker.

Learn more in the [Child Abuse Prevention Handbook for Service Providers](#), which has been revised to clarify reporting requirements regarding children and youth living in situations where there is domestic violence.

Topic: Internet Safety

Considerations

- It is hard to fully grasp the experiences that students are having online, as technology is ever-evolving, and new social media platforms are always coming in and out of popularity.
 - When in doubt, tell students to talk to their parents/guardians about the sites and platforms they are using.
 - Explain that you are suggesting this for their own safety, and that it is very important for their parents to understand exactly how they are using the Internet.
- Child predators can use online games and social media as a tool for grooming children and accessing personal information in bits and pieces over time through casual conversation.
 - To convey this to students, you can say something like “Most of the people on the Internet are not bad people. But just as there are dangerous people in the real world, there are also dangerous people online.”
 - Many students think they would be able to tell the difference between talking to a real child their own age and an adult pretending to be a child.
 - Ask them how they could tell.
 - Emphasize that the dangerous people online are smart and tricky, and they won’t say, “Hi there, I’m a kid like you! Tell me your address!”



Note: *There is a fine line between informing students of potential dangers and scaring them, but it is important to:*

- *encourage all students to be very cautious while using online platforms and to be very open with their parents*
 - *remind them that they will continue to have difficult and important decisions to make about how they use the Internet, because they will have more and more access to the Internet as they grow up*
- Ultimately, we cannot control what students do online; sometimes we can’t even control what they are doing on school devices. Parent education is a very important piece of the puzzle.
 - After having these conversations with your students, send some general information to parents about the kinds of apps and websites students listed as being popular, or features they have accessed.
 - For example: “Today we discussed Internet safety as a class. Students said they play online games such as A, B, C; use apps such as D, E, F; and use features such as video chatting and photo sharing. Please talk to your child about Internet


safety and the kinds of apps and games they are using. This would be a good time to do some research about the applications and the privacy laws surrounding them, and possibly to set up parental controls.”

- Allow students to ask questions about their experiences. Students may surprise you with their questions about making YouTube channels, befriending people they’ve never met, and sharing photos through platforms you’ve never even heard of.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Start by asking the class some questions about Internet use to get a sense of access and familiarity for your age group:
 - What is the Internet used for (e.g., researching school projects, coding, sharing information, finding recipes, social media, talking to your grandparents on facetime)?
 - Raise your hand if you have used the Internet to:
 - search for something for school
 - search for something you were interested in
 - play a game
 - watch TV
 - watch a video
 - Raise your hand if you have ever used a tablet or computer when your parents were not in the room watching with you. (Remember that students will often say they have less Internet access than they actually do.)
 - Raise your hand if you have ever been looking for one thing on the Internet but found something else. (Use a mild example, like searching for “Jaguar” — the animal — but getting pictures of a car.)
 - Raise your hand if you have ever seen something online that you think was probably not meant for kids.
- Tell students that the Internet is an amazing tool that all kinds of people use all the time. It allows us to access information quickly and easily, and it can be great. However, the computer or tablet doesn’t have the same judgment that a real person has. So sometimes information or images that are designed for adults end up being seen or accessed by children. This can happen by mistake, such as searching for a term with multiple meanings, or if you click on something by accident.
 - Some things that we see by mistake can make us feel uncomfortable or curious. Tell students that if they see something like that, it’s best to tell a teacher (if at school) or a trusted adult (if at home).
 - If appropriate for the age of your students, this may be a good time to talk about sexualized images and pornography. Some students access pornography online as early as Grade 5, and it is important to share the message that this is not a realistic representation of a sexual relationship.

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- Tell students that the Internet is also a tool that people use to connect with one another. A lot of people talk to their friends and family, connect with people who have similar interests, or chat and play online games with people they have never met.
 - Depending on the age of your students, they will have varying understandings and exposure to “talking on the Internet.” However, almost all students will eventually be exposed to this kind of communication, so it is never too early to start these conversations.
 - Talk to students about protecting their privacy:
 - Never give any personal information over the Internet.
 - Never share information with someone you have never met.
 - Sometimes you might think there is a good reason to share personal information. For example, let’s say you are chatting with a classmate in an online game and they ask you where your soccer game will be next weekend:
 - Do not share this information unless your parent or guardian is in the room with you and you have their permission. Some chat forums are not well-protected, so even if you are chatting with someone you know, your information could be accessed by strangers.
 - Depending on the age of your students, you might even suggest that they should talk to anyone online unless they are 100 percent sure it’s a friend or family member they know in real life.
 - Some students play online games with strangers, but with chatting features limited.

Some reminders for students

- *No one is responsible for monitoring YouTube videos, and anyone can post any opinion they want to share. Be critical of what you hear and see online: some people share views that are racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and generally inappropriate.*
- *Anything you post online is there forever – even after it’s been deleted.*
- *Keep things private. Don’t post personal information like your birthday, phone number, or address. Don’t share passwords with friends.*
- *Online bullying – spreading rumours, sharing mean or inappropriate pictures, threatening others, and so on – is a serious offence and can get you into trouble with the law.*
- *For Grade 5+: If you are under the age of 18, taking, sending, and sharing nude pictures of yourself or others can get you into trouble with the law and can also have very serious lifelong personal, social, and mental health consequences.*

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions.

- During these lessons, some students may want to share about things they've seen on the Internet, and you may not want to go down that road.
 - If they share about something that made them uncomfortable, tell them you're sorry that it happened, but that they can talk to you about it more in private if they would like to.

Topic: Puberty

Considerations

- Teach co-ed lessons (with boys and girls in the same room).
 - This promotes compassion and inclusion for all bodies: students need to know what their peers of other genders are going through.
 - Review body anatomy with students prior to this lesson. Use anatomically correct names.
- Normalize puberty by explaining that it is something that all bodies go through. It's not always easy and it takes years, but everyone goes on the journey to becoming an adult.
- All students enter and finish puberty at their own pace. While there are rough age ranges, these are not set in stone and students will begin and end puberty when their body says so.
 - "Your body is born with an internal alarm clock that tells your brain when to begin making and releasing hormones (from your pituitary gland)."

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Mention the following points:
 - Puberty begins because of hormones (estrogen and testosterone). All bodies have both, but in different amounts. After that, they continue to be released in a hormone cycle.
 - People grow at their own pace: some grow slow and steady, some grow fast (this is sometimes called a "growth spurt").
 - Facial oil/acne: Tell students that pimples are normal and it is best to leave them alone and not pick at them.
 - Body hair: Hair will grow all over the body, including the genitals.
 - Body hair is different from the hair on your head and will likely be a different colour and texture.
 - Everyone makes a personal decision about what to do with their body hair – including doing nothing at all!
 - If you choose to remove body hair, make sure you do it safely (using shaving cream with a razor, etc.).
 - Sweat: The body makes new sweat glands when entering puberty. Sweat now contains urea and may smell. Students may need to start using deodorant.
 - "Mads, Glads, Sads" (emotions and mood Swings): High highs and low lows. Mood swings are normal!

- Crushes: A crush is practice for an adult relationship. It’s your decision whether to tell others or to keep it to yourself.
 - Remind students that talking about someone else’s crush is a form of gossip.
 - This can be a good opportunity to give an example of a secret that is okay to keep (i.e., if a friend tells you about their crush).
- Voice change: This happens in all bodies, but will be more obvious break in males.
- Males:
 - Genitals will grow during puberty, and 50 percent of males will develop breast tissue (it will even out when the shoulders broaden).
 - Nocturnal emissions (wet dreams) – when extra sperm is released from the penis – are normal and mean that everything is working.
- Females:
 - Menstruation: Show products that can be used during menstruation (e.g., sanitary pad, tampon, Diva Cup, Lunapad) and explain where in the school they can be found.
- Sleep: Sleep is very important, because bodies are going through a lot of changes.
- Hygiene: Students need to clean their genitals daily with soap. Soap needs to actually touch their body in order to clean it!

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations.

- For students with “the giggles”:
 - See Topic: Body Science for ways to encourage students to think like scientists.
 - Allow students to put their heads down on the desk, take a break to get water, or take a short walk around the school to calm down so they can come back and continue to listen.
- If you have a Q&A session during the lesson, students may try and “throw you off” with a comment/question.
 - Provide the class with an anonymous “Question Box” and ask them to write questions or one thing they learned that day, without writing their names. Since everyone will be writing something, students will feel safe to ask. If possible, keep the Question Box available so that students can ask any questions that arise later.
 - Remember that you can always revisit a topic at a later date if you discover a better way to answer a question.

- If a student asks a question that you aren't sure how to answer, or do not know the answer to, get back to them. For example, say "That's a great question and I can understand why you would be curious about that. I'm not sure of the answer, but I will get back to you within a day with the answer."

Topic: Safe and Unsafe Touch

Considerations

- If possible, plan for your lessons to take place before a break like recess or lunch so students can speak to you in private if necessary, and for you to act appropriately if a student discloses to you.
- This topic touches on many themes from Topic: Consent, so refer to it as necessary.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:


- Ask students to share examples of “safe touch” and “unsafe touch”
 - Hug (safe if it doesn’t give you the “no” feeling)
 - Giving first aid (safe if you need help)
 - Hitting, pushing, kicking (unsafe)
 - Adult in the bathroom with a child safe only with a trusted adult; unless you need help, an adult should not be in the bathroom with you)
 - Examples of safe touch: adults helping young children, people with disabilities or serious injuries, or people who are very sick
 - Adult grabbing child’s arm (unsafe unless they are keeping you safe – for example, pulling you away from traffic)
 - Doctor and child alone– Usually a parent or trusted adult should be with you when you are with a medical professional. As you get older, you may not want your parents in the room with you when you are at the doctor’s office. If you feel uncomfortable while you are alone with a medical professional, you have the right to say no or stop, and to ask for a trusted adult to be with you.
 - Avoid using generalizations such as “a medical professional” as an example of a trusted adult for “safe touch.”
 - Remind students that if they have the uncomfortable “no” feeling, they have the right to say no to anyone, even a medical professional or family member.
- Talk about how sometimes we are “uncomfortable” when we need help or we are hurt. For example, if you scrape your knee, cleaning the wound is painful and uncomfortable, but you need help with it.
 - Distinguish between being in pain and having the “no” feeling.
- Teach what a “no” feeling and “discomfort” look like and feel like.

Discomfort

We often use the word “discomfort” with regard to a growth mindset and building resilience. Being “uncomfortable” can be a good thing if it encourages us to push ourselves and try new things.

However, it is important to distinguish this discomfort from the discomfort we feel when someone tries to touch us in a way we don’t like. Students need to figure out what is the root of discomfort: are you trying to push yourself “out of your comfort zone” or is someone else making you feel uncomfortable?


- Tell students that if someone is touching them in a way that gives them the “no” feeling, it is not a safe touch, and they should do everything they can to make it stop.
 - Say “stop” or “no.”
 - Tell a trusted adult about it, and keep telling until someone helps to make it stop.
- Model, and have your students practise, using a strong voice to say “no” or “stop”:
 - Explicitly demonstrate what someone using a strong voice should sound like.
- Ensure that students know that anyone who is being touched in an inappropriate manner is allowed to do whatever they need to do to get away, including kicking, punching, biting, screaming, and so on.
 - Remind them that violence like this is usually not okay, but if it’s a matter of protecting yourself, it is allowed and encouraged.
 - If someone ever tries to pick you up and put you in a car, do everything in your power to get away!
 - Emphasize that they will never be in trouble for protecting themselves from unsafe touch. The person doing or trying to do the touching is always in the wrong, no matter who they are.
- Explicitly state that when someone says “yes,” “I like that,” or “no,” “stop,” we have to listen to the person the first time. This is called giving consent (“yes”) or not giving consent (“no,” “stop”). (See Topic: Consent.)
- Ask students to identify their two private areas: breasts and genitals (for both males and females).
 - Remind students that no one should ever ask them to look at or touch their private areas, and that they should never ask to look at or touch someone else’s private areas.
 - By the time most students are at school, it is unlikely that they would need help from someone in a way that includes touching any of the two private areas (breasts and genitals).

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- There is also no reason why a student would need to look or touch someone else's private areas.
 - Discuss how some families kiss their family members, and that is totally normal as long as everyone is comfortable with it!
 - You may also discuss how sometimes we show our private areas to parents or doctors for our own health and safety. For example, if a student has unusual pain in a private area, they should tell a trusted adult.
 - Talk to your students about secrets. Ask for examples of some secrets that are good to keep.
 - A secret that is good to keep is one that eventually will be revealed (e.g., surprise party, the gift you will give your sister for her birthday).
 - Another kind of secret that is good to keep is when someone is trusting you with private information where no one is being hurt or will be hurt (e.g., a friend tells you who they have a crush on, their grandparent is sick, or their parents are getting divorced).
 - Sharing a secret like that might hurt a friend's feelings because they didn't want to talk about it with a lot of people, and it's very personal. Never tell a secret like to another friend. If you aren't sure if it's a secret you should keep, tell a trusted adult and they will help you.
 - If someone tells you a secret about being touched in an unsafe way, that person is being hurt and needs help. Tell a trusted adult and keep telling until someone helps. Your friend might be a bit upset at first, but you are doing the right thing because you care about them.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions.

- If a student asks a question or says something that you think might be disclosure:
 - Find a natural way to stop the lesson and ask students to do an alternative activity. Speak to the student in private, show empathy, honour the child, and offer support.
 - Clarify their statement and get the essential facts (how, who, what, and when; avoid why) to help you decide whether to make a report.
 - Once you have gathered enough information, stop asking questions. As a teacher it is not your job to interview the child.
 - Take detailed notes as soon as possible.
 - Remind the student that they are not in trouble, and tell them that you will get them help (but avoid making promises).



The [Child, Family and Community Service Act](#) (CFCSA) requires that anyone who has reason to believe that a child or youth has been or is likely to be abused or neglected must report the suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker.

Learn more in the [Child Abuse Prevention Handbook for Service Providers](#), which has been revised to clarify reporting requirements regarding children and youth living in situations where there is domestic violence.

You can also find out more at:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse>

Topic: Safer Sex (Including STIs)

Considerations

- Use the term “STI” (sexually transmitted infection) not “STD” (sexually transmitted disease). Most STIs are curable infections, not diseases. The word “disease” has a negative connotation, suggesting that it is stuck with the person. STIs are either viral or bacterial.
- Remind students that sex, in all its varieties, should always be consensual for both people.
 - Remind students what consent looks/sounds/feels like. (See Topic: Consent.)
- Don’t impose your beliefs and values on the topics covered (e.g., people must be married to have sex).
- Graphic images are often used as a scare tactic for STI prevention. This is both unnecessary and potentially traumatic for some people.
- Have clinic information readily available so students can access information and health services.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Discuss different options to use to prevent pregnancy (except for condoms, these do not prevent STIs):
 - IUD (hormonal and copper)
 - Contraceptive pill
 - Vaginal ring
 - Injection
 - Hormonal patch
 - Condoms (male and female)
- Discuss emergency contraception after unprotected sex:
 - Two options: IUD or emergency contraceptive pills (including the varieties available)
 - There is no need to go to the doctor for pill option, as it is available at most pharmacies/clinics.
- Discuss why condoms are good protection against both an STI and an unwanted pregnancy.
 - Condoms are one-use only and come in different varieties.
 - While condoms provide good protection against an unplanned pregnancy, combining condom use with other contraception provides even better protection in case of accidents (e.g., a condom used improperly or breaking).

- Explain that while the use of contraceptives can significantly reduce the chances of unplanned pregnancies, the only guaranteed way to prevent pregnancy and the spread of STIs is not having sex.
- Tell students that as soon as they are sexually active, they should be get regular testing for STIs, including testing for HIV (this is a blood test).
 - Some STIs don't cause symptoms. Or they cause symptoms that then go away. This is why it is important to get checked regularly.
 - STI testing is free in B.C.
 - Testing using involves a medical professional taking a sample of body fluid from the throat, inside the tip of the penis, or inside the rectum or vagina. Urinating into a medical cup and a blood test can also be parts of an STI test.
 - Testing and results are completely anonymous and confidential. Parents/guardians will not be given the information.
- For the most part, treating an STI is as simple as treating an infection like strep throat. You would go to a doctor to get treatment for strep throat, and STIs are the same.
 - This is a good opportunity to talk about the dangers of stigma preventing people from getting the treatment they need.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations:

- If you have a Q&A session during the lesson, students may try and “throw you off” with a comment/question.
 - Provide the class with an anonymous “Question Box” and ask them to write questions or one thing they learned that day, without writing their names. Since everyone will be writing something, students will feel safe to ask. If possible, keep the Question Box available so that students can ask any questions that arise later.
 - Remember that you can always revisit a topic at a later date if you discover a better way to answer a question.
- Provide students with specific instructions for accessing resources and support. For example, contact local health authorities to get current phone numbers and websites for resources, or show students how to get to the closest resources on foot, by bus, and so on.

Topic: Well-Being

Considerations

- Introduce multiple strategies to support student well-being so that students can take away strategies they can use for themselves in daily life.
 - Name the strategies specifically.
 - Incorporate them in your class.
 - Model their use. For example:
 - “Wow, I think the class is feeling sleepy this afternoon! Let’s go outside and get some exercise so when we come back we will feel more focused.”
 - “I am feeling frustrated because my projector isn’t working. I’m going to take some deep breaths to calm down before I try this again.”
 - “I can tell that the class is getting into the silly zone. What are some strategies we can try so we are better able to learn? Let’s try a mindful moment.”
 - Practise them often.
- Make conversation about emotions part of your class routine – for example, via Mood Meters, journals, class meetings, nonverbal check-ins with hand gestures, morning greetings.
 - This is also a good way to build class community and make all students feel safe and welcome.
 - Try using these sentence frames suggested by Allan Kehler:
 - To move from the everyday pleasantries of “How’s it going” to show you are really asking because you care: “How are you feeling today, [name]?”
 - If you have serious concerns about a student, and you want to show concern, open up a channel for conversation, or help them seek support and resources: “I don’t want to pry, but I want you to know that I am concerned about you, and I am here to listen if you ever want to talk.”
 - If possible, create a “Calm Corner” where students can choose to take a break. You can also incorporate a “calm-down kit” with a variety of sensory and visual tools like stress balls, fidgets, and so on. There are lots of do-it-yourself ideas online.
 - Remind students that these are tools, not toys.
 - Make a connection with wearing glasses so you can see and learn: some people need a tool to calm down so they can learn.
- Talk to your administration about options for accessing school and/or district funds to support the Health curriculum.
- Use a Social Emotional Learning framework in your class. Try to create a sense of belonging and mutual respect among your students.
- Create a safe and welcoming learning space.


- Counsellors play an important role in supporting students' mental well-being in a one-to-one setting. But collaborating and having counsellors do lessons with the whole class can also be hugely beneficial for students. Talk to the school counsellor about co-teaching – specifically about strategies for coping with difficulty.
 - All students may need to use these strategies to cope in times of difficulty.
 - When all students learn these strategies, they may be more likely to know the signs of distress, ask for support when they need it, and support one another.
- Remember to model the use of appropriate language in your classroom and encourage students to do the same. For example, using words and expressions like “crazy,” “just get over it,” or “don’t be so sensitive” can be hurtful and perpetuate stereotypes.
- Students can express themselves in many different ways. Be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure about student self-harm. If you have concerns about a student, speak to your school counsellor.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Discuss stress and anxiety and clarify the differences between chronic mental health issues and day-to-day stressors.
 - See Topic: Brain Science for more information on making the connection between brain chemistry, mental wellness, and treatment for chronic mental illness.
 - Remind students that being sad for a short while is an important part of life, but being sad for an extended period of time can mean something else.
 - Discourage students from casually using expressions like “I’m so depressed – I didn’t get to see the movie I wanted” or “I was so bored – I wanted to die.” Remind students that this can be very hurtful for people who truly struggle with those feelings.
 - Introduce a “Size of the Problem Scale” to help students identify and manage their feelings and reactions to daily stressors and disappointments.
 - After introducing this framework, a simple prompt like “Is it a big problem or a little problem?” can help students gain perspective during a time of difficulty.
 - When students feel like they are coping with a big problem, ask “Will you be able to sleep tonight?”
 - If they say no, they may need more intensive support to break down their feelings and concerns, and help them use coping strategies.
 - Remember to follow up to show students that you care and to give them a chance to self-reflect.
 - If the worries persist, they may require support from a professional counsellor.

- Talk to students about the things they can control and things they cannot control. Remind students that the only thing we have full control over is our own behaviour.
 - Sometimes worrying a little bit can be a good thing. We need drivers to be a little bit worried about driving safely! When baseball and softball players go up to bat, they worry a bit about watching the pitch so they can hit the ball. If no one ever worried about paying attention in class, we would never learn anything!
 - It's not healthy to worry about things that we have no control over. After a certain point, we need to let go of the things we cannot control. You can support students with this by having them imagine a balloon with their worry inside, letting go of the balloon, and watching it float away.
- Introduce and use stress- and anxiety-reducing activities, such as the following:
 - Gratitude lessons, journals, and circle sharing – Encouraging students to be thankful for things in categories to focus their thinking. For example:
 - “What is something you are grateful for that you cannot buy in a store?”
 - “Name something in nature that you are grateful for.”
 - “Think of a person in your family you are grateful for and one thing in particular that you appreciate about that person.”
 - Mindfulness activities – The main goal of mindfulness activities is to practise awareness and nonjudgment.
 - Search “mindfulness exercises” online, or search for guided mindful breathing/eating/scripts, and you’ll find countless activity ideas.
 - There are some good explorations of mindfulness using the senses, such as counting three things you can see, two things you can hear, one thing you can smell or feel.
 - Breathing exercises – Again, there are countless options, such as box breathing, figure-8 breathing, and visualizing. For example:
 - To slow down breathing: Inhale “smell the flowers”/ Exhale “blow out the candles”,
 - To decrease anxieties have students put a picture to their breath: Inhale “Happy Feelings/ Images/ Colours” Exhale “Worries” etc.
 - Play a recorded guided meditation for kids that practises visualizing calm spaces.
 - Positive self-talk – Introduce the idea of using a mantra in times of difficulty, or to reassure oneself during times of excessive worrying. For example:
 - “I can do this”/“I can handle it”
 - “I am happy”/“I am good”
 - “Let it go” (for worries, add a visual image of a balloon floating away)

- 
- Physical activity, such as yoga and brain breaks – If possible, allow students to self-regulate and get fresh air or exercise as needed.
 - Incorporate outdoor education whenever possible. Being outdoors can have powerful restorative benefits.
 - Encourage students to turn to family, friends, and pets for support.
 - Tell students that hobbies, like crafting, colouring, drawing, cooking, sports, journalling, and creative writing, can be very helpful.
 - Remind students about the importance of sleep, and reducing screen time, especially before bed.
 - If appropriate for the age of your students, you could also discuss examples of unhealthy coping strategies, such as using substances and alcohol, burying yourself in work, avoiding friends, and bingeing (e.g., over-eating, over-exercising).

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations.

- If you are unsure about whether to refer a student to a school counsellor, talk to the counsellor.
- Provide students with specific instructions for accessing resources and support. For example, contact local health authorities to get current phone numbers and websites for resources, or show students how to get to the closest resources on foot, by bus, and so on.

Resources

- Crisis Text Help Line: Text HOME to 686868 in Canada to text with a trained crisis responder
- Kids Help Phone: Kids Help Phone counsellors are available 24/7 at 1-800-668-6868
- Options for Sexual Health: <https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/>

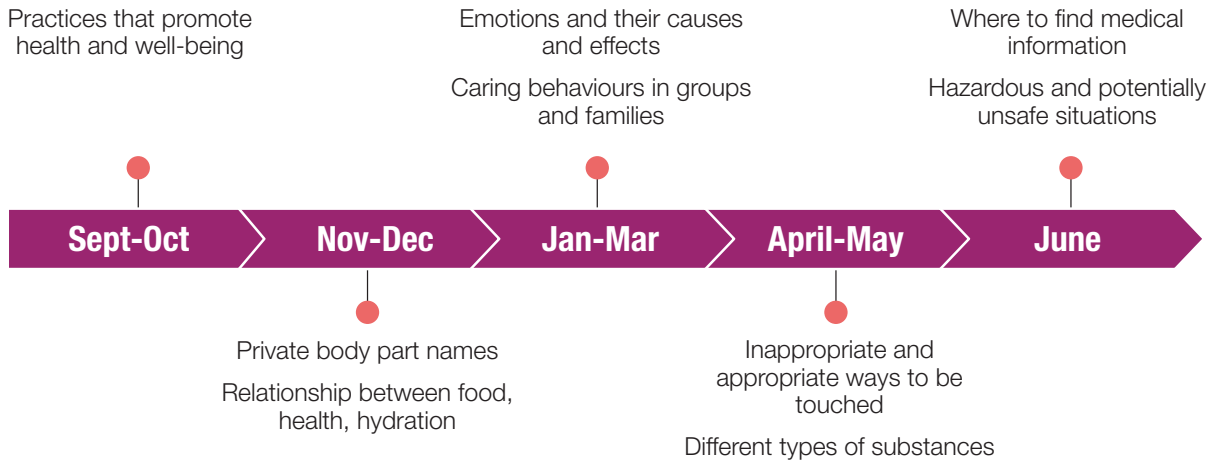
Information about reporting child abuse can be found at:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse>

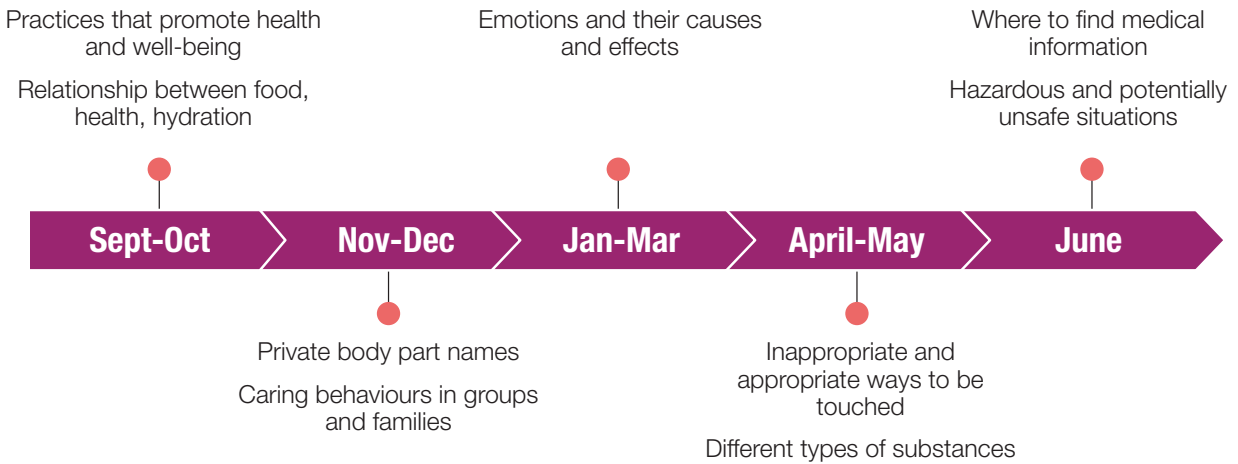
To report child abuse and neglect in B.C., call 1-800-663-9122.

K-Grade 10 Suggested Topics

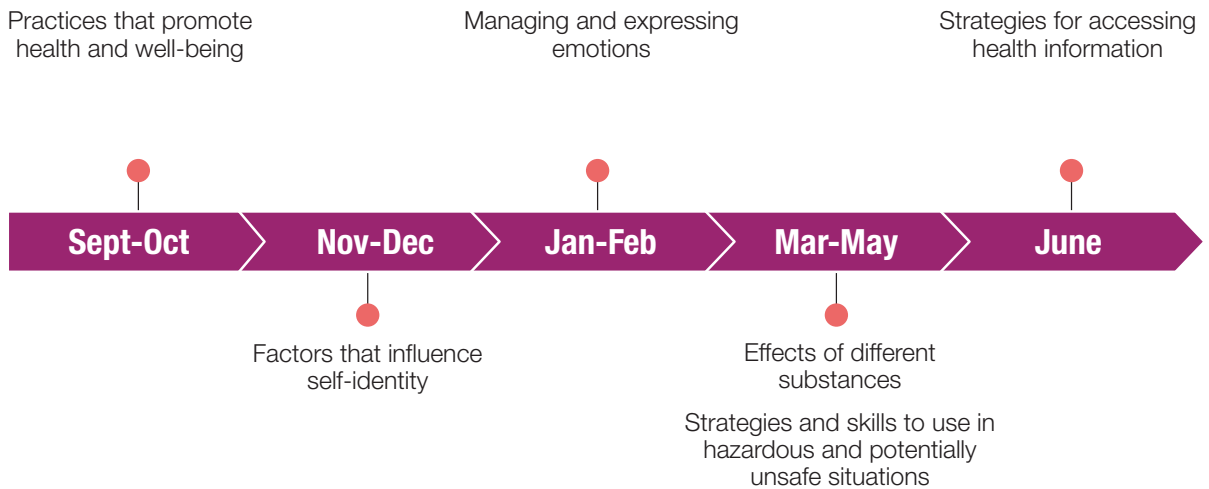
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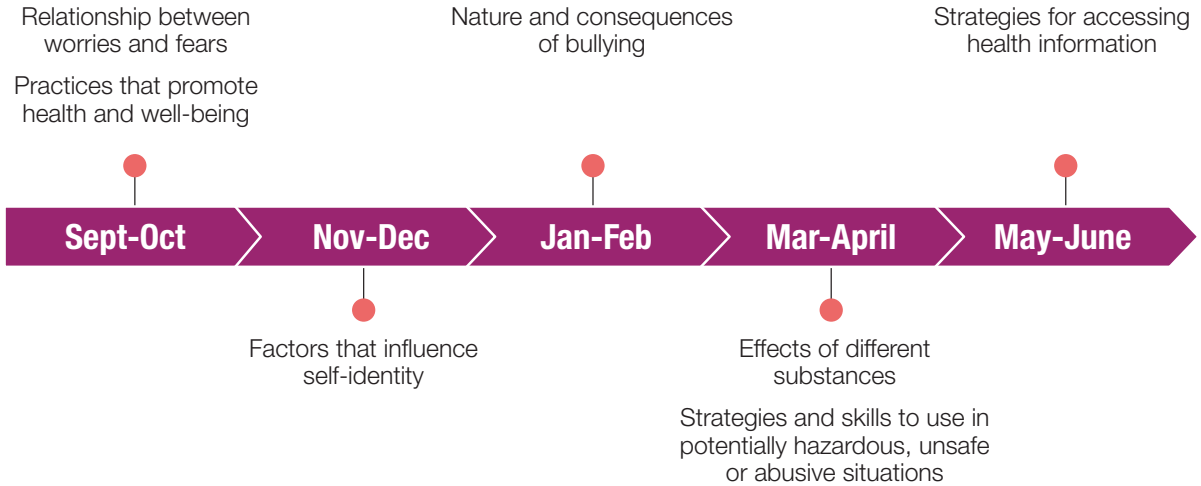
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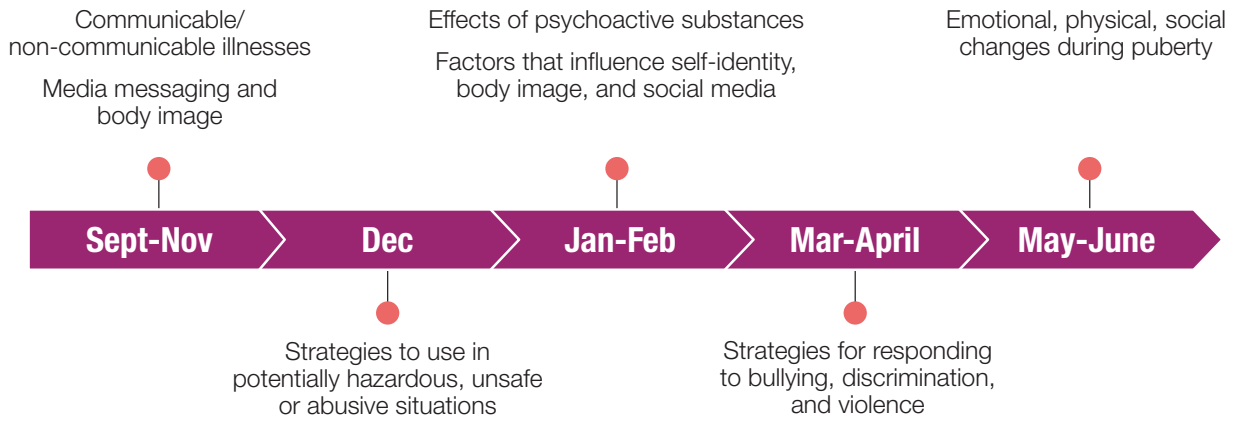
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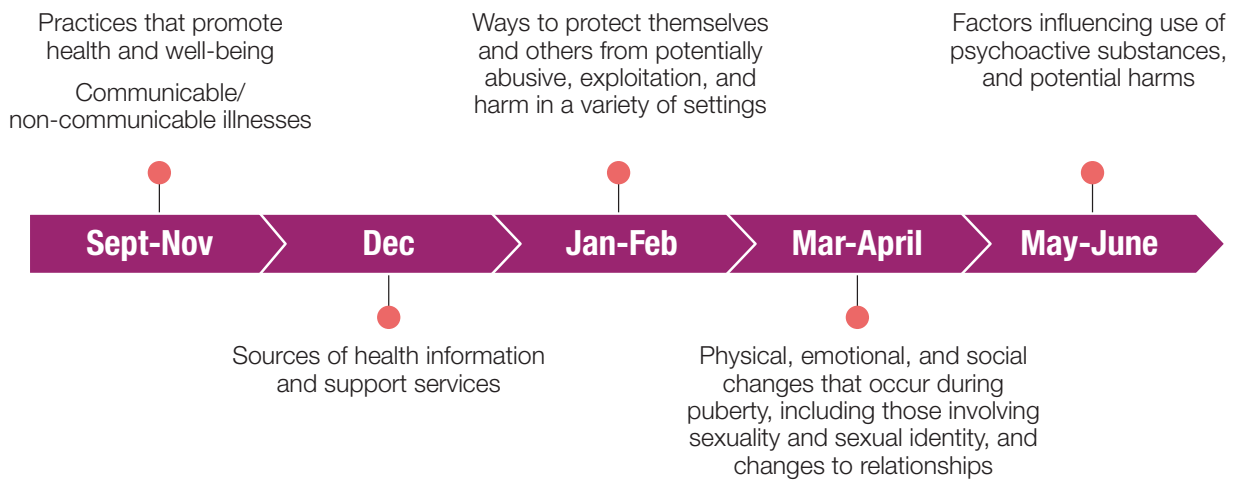
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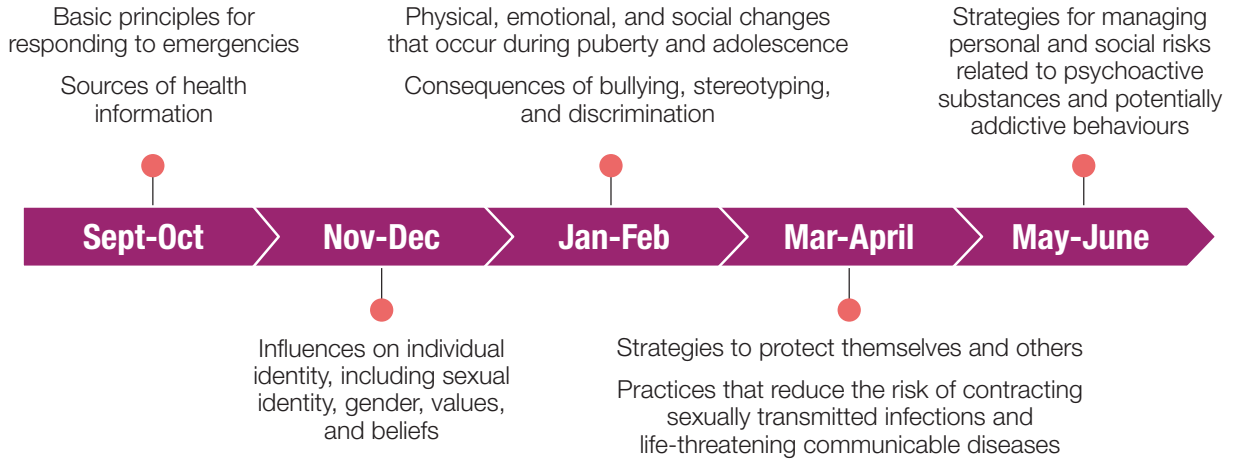
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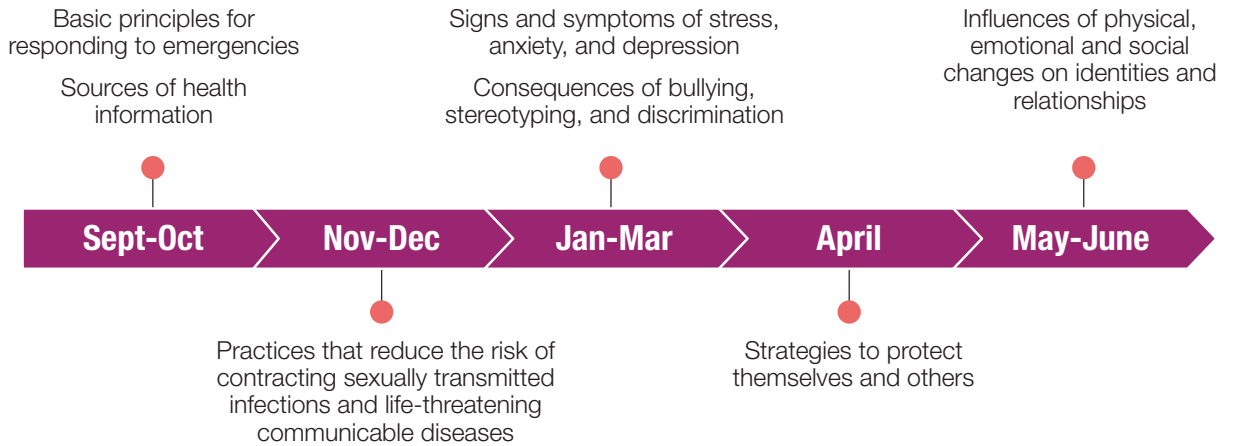
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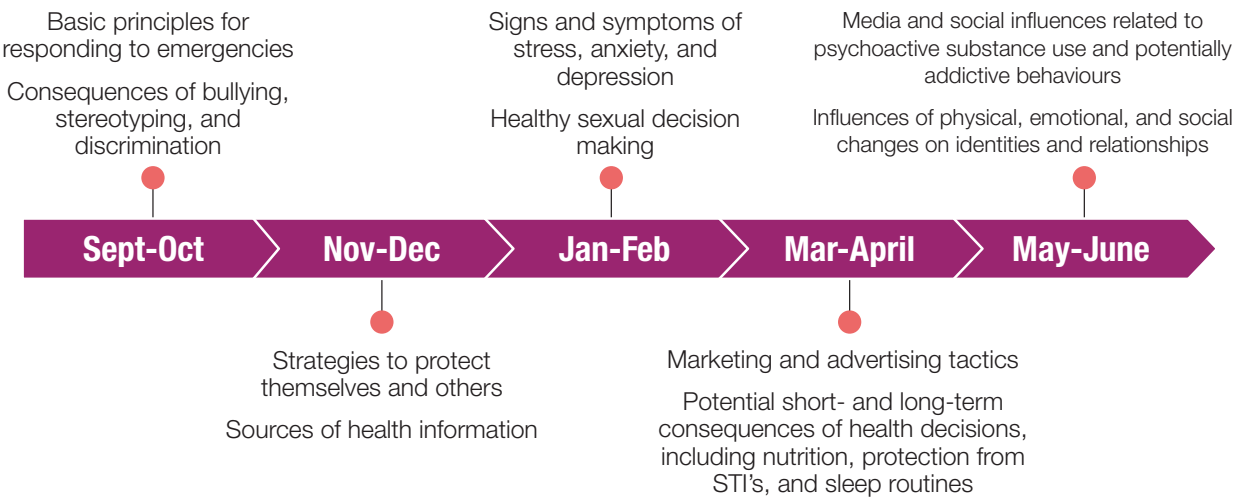
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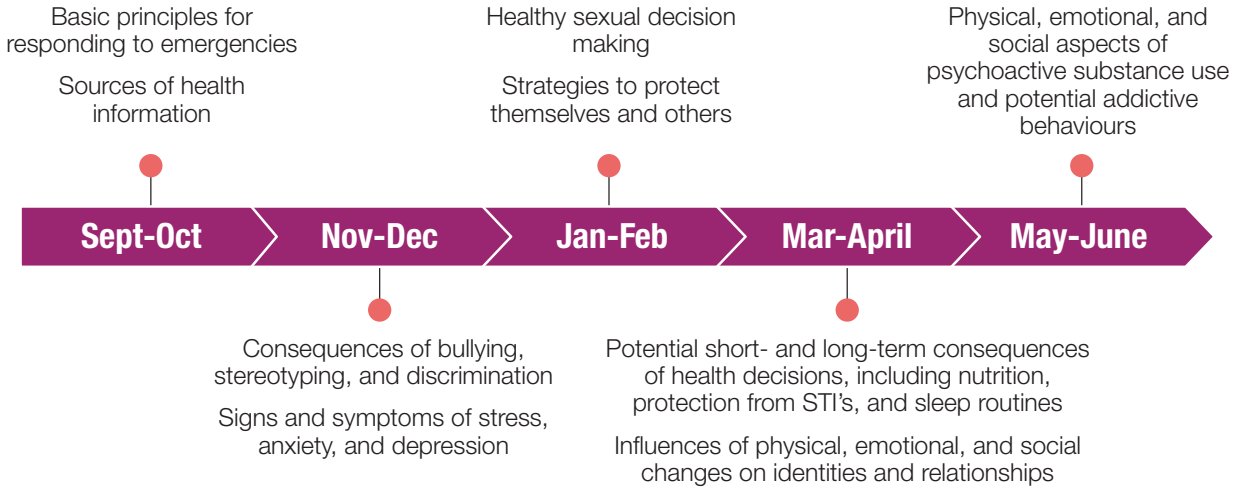
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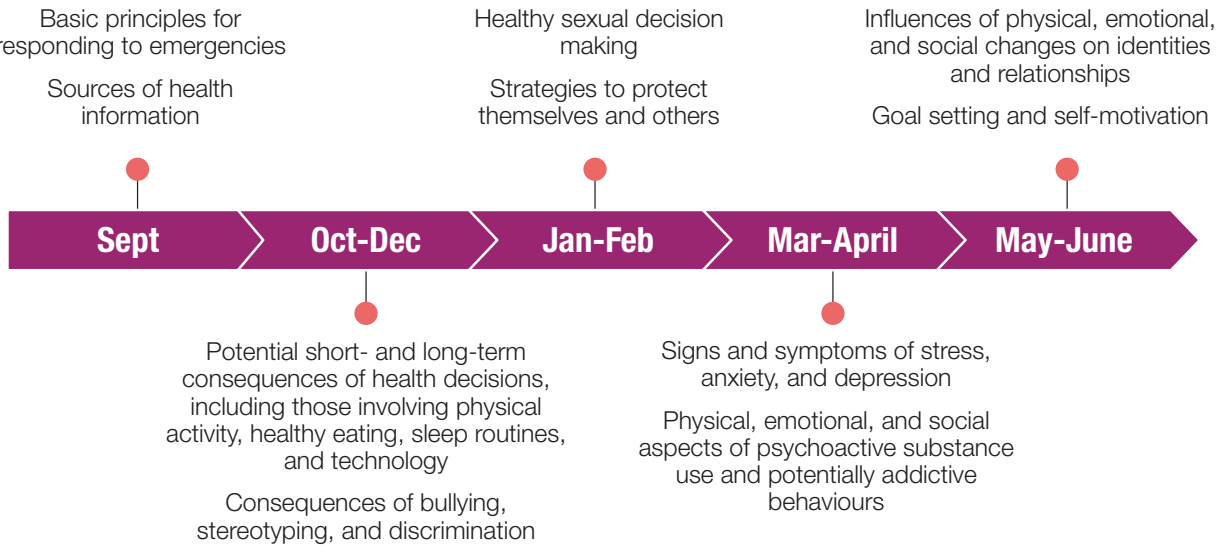
Grade 8



Grade 9



Grade 10



Sample Letter to Send Home

To parents/guardians,

Sexual and mental health is part of the PHE (Physical and Health Education) curriculum. When people know information about their body, they are empowered to make healthy decisions. As our province has moved to a more holistic approach to health, knowing how our bodies and minds develop is vital to children keeping themselves healthy and safe.

Students will be learning about their bodies as they develop both physically and emotionally. This learning will take place in a safe space. Throughout the year, students will be learning a variety of topics. Please see below for a rough guideline for the years learning. All information shared will be from the Grade (X) curriculum, which you can view online at:

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/physical-health-education>

September – October: (list topics to be covered)

(continue for the rest of the year)...

If you have questions about any of the topics covered in Health, I would be happy to discuss this further.

I look forward to all the learning we will be doing together this year.

Alternative Delivery Policy

In British Columbia, the Alternative Delivery Policy gives parents the ability to teach health topics from the Physical and Health Education curriculum at home. However, it is important to note that this does not exempt students from learning about these topics. Parents must work with their school so that their children meet these learning standards at home and a student must be able to demonstrate their understanding of these topics.

While there are no provincial guidelines regarding how parents are notified about upcoming topics, it is recommended that parents receive enough notice about topics to give them an opportunity to contact you regarding specific topics of concern. This gives you opportunities to work through potential areas of concern rather than simply remove their children from these lessons.

More detailed information about the Alternative Delivery Policy is available online at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/alternative-delivery-in-the-physical-and-health-curriculum>