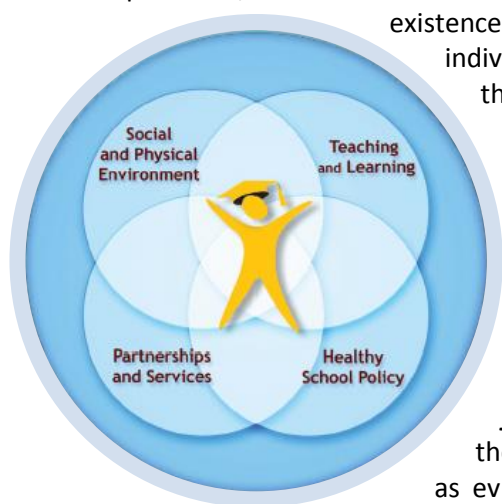


Making the Grade: Positive Mental Health Practices In Schools

Prepared and submitted by the pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health in collaboration with Dr. Patti Peterson and Dr. Bill Morrison

When it comes to mental health, recent research in the health and education spheres cites the importance of moving beyond a problem-focused, interventionist approach to one that is more pro-active and prevention-oriented, also known as “**Positive Mental Health (PMH)**.”

While there remains a lack of complete clarity around what is meant by the term, PMH is the general recognition that psychological well-being is not only influenced by the absence of problems, disease or mental illness, but is also impacted by the existence of factors present within individuals and their social settings



that contribute to positive growth and development. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), “Fostering the development of positive mental health by supporting individual resilience, creating supportive environments and addressing the influence of the broader determinants of mental health are key components of promoting mental health.”

Recognizing that for many students, school is a source of social connection, safety and belonging, the **Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH)** is working to promote PMH practices through the school setting. Using a “Comprehensive School Health” approach, and as evident in the diagram, the JCSH encourages the incorporation of PMH practices within **four pillars of school and learning**:

1 - Healthy School Policies are the management practices, decision-making processes, rules, procedures and policies at all levels that promote health and wellbeing, and shape a respectful, welcoming and caring school environment.

Healthy School Policies for Positive Mental Health:

Does your school...

- ✓ provide alternatives to zero-tolerance policies that allow for continued school connectedness and restoration?
- ✓ ensure that all students and staff members are held accountable for upholding and modeling rules pertaining to respectful behavior?
- ✓ have policies that contribute to the physical and emotional safety of all students?
- ✓ accommodate the learning and social needs of all students, including those with exceptionalities?
- ✓ offer ongoing professional development related to positive mental health?

“Fostering the development of positive mental health by supporting individual resilience, creating supportive environments and addressing the influence of the broader determinants of mental health are key components of promoting mental health.”

- Canadian Institute for Health Information

2 - Social and Physical Environment refers to the quality of the relationships among school staff and students, the emotional well-being of students, and the buildings, grounds, play space and equipment in and surrounding the school.

Social and Physical Environment

for Positive Mental Health:

Does your school...

- ✓ allow and encourage students to participate in decision-making?
- ✓ foster an atmosphere of trust, tolerance, co-operation and empathy?
- ✓ have a welcoming, student-centred environment (e.g. sofas, decorative plants, student artwork, quotes and photos on display)?
- ✓ showcase student achievement and unity?
- ✓ design its physical spaces so that students can access facilities, maneuver within them, and participate fully in planned learning activities?

3 - Teaching and Learning impacts PMH, and includes the resources, activities and provincial/territorial curriculum where students gain age-appropriate knowledge and experiences, helping to build the skills to improve their health and wellbeing.

Teaching and Learning

for Positive Mental Health:

Does your school...

- ✓ provide students with an enhanced understanding and appreciation of diversity?
- ✓ incorporate culturally-relevant themes into instructional practices and activities?
- ✓ offer students the chance to learn and practice social skills?
- ✓ accommodate individual learning needs and preferences?
- ✓ support autonomy by minimizing control, listening to and validating student perspectives?

Partnerships and Services

for Positive Mental Health:

Does your school...

- ✓ interact with the home regarding student learning issues?
- ✓ collaborate with families in the design of school improvement and learning initiatives?
- ✓ adopt policy to ensure collaboration with community and government organizations?
- ✓ offer opportunities for participation in school-community action groups or committees?

4 - Partnerships and Services are an essential aspect of the facilitation of a Comprehensive School Health approach. When connections are established between a school, its students' families and surrounding community organizations, supportive working relationships are formed, enabling health, education and other sectors to work together to advance school health.

For more information regarding Positive Mental Health, please see "Schools as a Setting for Promoting Positive Mental Health: Better Practices and Perspectives" at the JCSH website:

www.jcsh-cces.ca