

## Celebrating and Promoting Children's Mental Health

Children's Mental Health Week is happening May 5-11 in Ontario. It's a time to focus on the important ways we can promote and nurture the mental health and well-being of our children.

### **Mental Health: A State Of Well-Being**

Did you know that we ALL have mental health? It is more than just the absence of illness. Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community (World Health Organization). Indigenous teaching reminds us that mental wellness is a balance of the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional parts of ourselves and is enriched when individuals experience purpose, hope, belonging and meaning in their lives (First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework). A child's mental health is just as important as their physical health when it comes to success at school, in friendships and in life.

### **Here are some key tips and strategies to nurture your child's mental health and resilience from your PDSB Mental Health Resource Team:**

- **Safe, responsive relationships** between adults and children is our greatest tool for promoting positive development and mental health in youth. When a child has consistent, caring adults in their life both at home and in the community, when they know they are loved and valued no matter what, and have someone trusted they can turn to when a problem arises, their resilience is bolstered.
- **Listen and validate feelings.** Encourage children to talk about their thoughts and feelings, and show lots of love and acceptance. Keep the conversation flowing by asking open-ended questions and spending quality time together at mealtimes and by participating together in activities your child enjoys.
- **Help Your Child Develop a Positive Sense of Self.** A child's self-perception is linked with their mental health. Help them set realistic goals; praise them for effort as well as achievement by providing genuine, realistic praise. Foster positive connections with their cultural or faith community. A child with high self-esteem believes they are a good person, understands their positive qualities and strives for a successful, happy life.
- **Model and Teach Healthy Ways to Manage Stress.** While it's important to try to protect your child from overwhelming or toxic stress, not *all* stress is bad. In fact, some stress helps us motivate and prepare us to perform our best, and there is bound to be some stress after a disagreement with friends or being cut from a sports team. Give your child the tools they need to cope with stress and big feelings in a healthy way: establish healthy habits including exercise, getting enough sleep and proper nutrition; practicing gratitude and deep breathing, journaling or talking with a trusted adult are just a few examples.
- **Notice Changes and Reach Out for Help.** If you notice signs that your child feels sad or overly anxious about normal situations like going to school or meeting new people, take note. A change in mood or behaviour that lasts more than two weeks, impacting social problems, academic issues or family problems could be sign of a mental health concern. Keep the lines of communication open with your child's teacher and other caring adults in their life to discuss observations. Remember, there is no age too early for a child or family to see a mental health provider; in fact, it might benefit the whole family by providing resources and support to caregivers who may be struggling, too.

### **Where Can I Get Help?**

**At school,** your child can reach out to their teacher, coach, guidance teacher or school administrator as a starting point, to talk about their mental health. Every PDSB school is also assigned Social Work and Psychology staff to provide consultation and direct service to students, and assist students and families to get connected to helpful resources in the community.

**In the community,** visit [www.WhereToStart.ca](http://www.WhereToStart.ca) to access mental health services for children and youth in Peel. For a quick guide to mental health resources, visit [bit.ly/PeelYouthResources](http://bit.ly/PeelYouthResources).

**For more tips on building mental health and resilience, visit [bit.ly/ResiliencyTips](http://bit.ly/ResiliencyTips)**

**For updates and to follow along with the work of the PDSB Mental Health Resource Team, find them on Twitter @MHRTPeel.**

*Adapted from Caring for Kids (2019) and Very Well Family (2018).*



## Promoting Wellbeing in Your Children This Summer: The Importance of Structure

From the PDSB Mental Health Resource Team

Summer vacation is almost here! Children can barely wait to put away their backpacks and spend their days free. Although this might be true for many, children and parents rely on structure to help guide the day, even in the summer. Structure holds kids and allows them to feel safe, knowing what to expect throughout the day and the week. Although it is crucial for children to have unstructured, free time each day, it is important for there to be some routine and structure (however you define it) to help children manage their emotions. Parents and children should sit down and discuss the summer plans, whether it is camp every day or multiple weeks off in a row, kids need to know what to expect.

### **Things to consider:**

- Know your child. Is your child someone who does better with structure or unstructured time? How do they respond during school year vacations and summers past? Think ahead about summer plans based on who they are.
- Create structure somewhere and communicate it. Children do better when they know what to expect and understand the overall plan.
- Structure doesn't have to mean committing to camps or organized activities but it can include doing expectable activities like reading in the afternoon, attending regular events (story hour at the library on Wednesdays), and having regular days to play with friends.
- Although not vital, many children do best when they participate in some organized activity.
- Make sure your child is getting plenty of time to eat, sleep, read, and play - with peers, with family, alone, and outside.

### **What to look out for:**

- Loneliness. Often, when children lose the structure of school, they can become socially isolated and lonely, which can lead to poor mental health. Stay tuned in to whether your child is maintaining regular, healthy social contact with peers.
- Increased anxiety. Many people (especially children) experience increased anxiety when structure is lost. Look for symptoms of irritability, excessive worry, preoccupation, trouble sleeping, change in appetite (more or less), change in energy (more or less), trouble concentrating, and physical symptoms (belly aches, headaches, etc.).
- Increased screen time. Often children turn to the screen (television, computer, or video games) to help manage boredom over the summer. Although this moderate screen time is reasonable, excessive screen time can create other psychological and physical issues.

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## On the road again—how to keep your cyclist safe

Here are some tips you can review with your child to ensure bike season gets off to a great start:

### **The right fit**

- children should be able to straddle the bike with both feet on the ground
- a bike that is too big or too small can be a safety hazard
- the helmet should fit—if it's too loose, it could fall off, if it's too tight, it's uncomfortable

### **Get noticed**

- a young child's bike should be equipped with a bell and reflector
- older riders should have a light and/or reflectors

### **Follow the rules**

- no riding on busy streets
- no riding at night
- stop for all STOP signs

### **Actions that cause injuries**

- driveway ride out—not stopping and looking both ways before entering the street
- running the stop sign
- turning without warning
- cycling in the dark
- following the leader—one child goes through a stop sign or misses a parked car but the second cyclist doesn't