

# "Creating Awareness for Children's Mental Health in the Classroom"

## Activities for Children's Mental Health Week Classroom Activities Meeting Ontario's Curriculum k-12



### Background

Part of helping those with mental health challenges is helping the general public change their attitude towards mental health. If the public's attitude towards mental health is open and supportive, then more people with mental health challenges will seek help earlier.

Children in particular are unaware of what mental health means. However, statistics show that "1 in five children experience mental health challenges."\* If we help to educate children and youth about the symptoms and how to get help, then as a society we can help reduce the long-term impact of mental health on one's quality of life.

"Children's Mental Health Week" is across the world and is a pertinent time to raise awareness at your school about mental health. Through various activities, individual classes and the whole school can help to bring this issue out of the shadows.

Below are suggestions for whole school initiatives and individual grade level activities.

### Whole School Initiatives

- Organize an assembly during Children's Mental Health Week (May – check the internet for specific dates each year)
- Invite speakers who can address topics related to children's mental health and can speak to the importance of good mental health
- Showcase student's work generated from the activities that were organized in individual classes leading up Children's Mental Health week (i.e. poem readings, movies, theme song, etc)
- Host an all school competition for a documentary communicating "what mental health means to them? Or how it affects youth" or choose another related theme – example – Colleen's Story - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mtl\\_HEjqxhk&fmt=18](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mtl_HEjqxhk&fmt=18)
- Host an all school competition for a song that embraces the adopted school theme for children's mental health week.

### Elementary Level Class Based Initiatives

**Kindergarten & Grade 1** : *Curriculum Expectation* - "Demonstrate a sense of identity and a positive self-image" **Activity** - Communicating feelings and answering why we feel a certain way – Students communicate orally or through pictures – "Sometimes I feel sad because....." "Sometimes others feel sad because....." Students then brainstorm

\* <http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca>

Information provided by Iris the Dragon - [www.iristhedragon.com](http://www.iristhedragon.com)

ways to feel better. The solutions could be communicated through short skits or puppet plays.

**Grade 1** – *Curriculum Expectation* - “Demonstrate understanding of a text by retelling the story or restating information from the text, including the main idea.”

**Activity** – Retell the Story - Using the Iris the Dragon book series –

[www.irsithedragon.com](http://www.irsithedragon.com) read aloud the book and have students retell the story through a puppet show which could be performed in front of another class or assembly.

**Grade 2** – *Curriculum Expectation* - “Write short texts using several simple forms – i.e. letters.” **Activity** – Write a Letter to Iris. Students could read one of the Iris the Dragon Books from the series and write to Iris the Dragon about their mental health concerns in the form of a letter.

**Grade 3** – *Curriculum Expectation* - “Responding to and Evaluating Texts - identify traits they admire in the characters.” **Activity** – What makes Iris the Dragon a good helper for those with mental health challenges? After reading one of the Iris the Dragon Books, students can respond by creating a Web Diagram or Mind Map about why Iris the Dragon is a good helper to those with mental health challenges.

**Grade 4 – 6** – *Curriculum Expectation* - “Vocal Skills and Strategies - identify some vocal effects, including tone, pace, pitch, volume, and a range of sound effects, and use them appropriately and with sensitivity towards cultural differences to help communicate their meaning.” **Activity** – Creating Awareness for Mental Health – Students could read and host a discussion to younger grades about mental health using Iris the Dragon books or develop a poster campaign focusing on specific aspects of mental health that promote understanding and support.

**Grade 7 & 8** – *Curriculum Expectation* - “Producing Media Texts & Research - produce a variety of media texts for specific purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques (e.g. a multimedia presentation to inform younger, a pamphlet outlining the researched)” **Activity** – Choose a Mental Health Topic & Create a Public Awareness Campaign – through a pamphlet or other multimedia medium, students research a specific mental health topic i.e. depression, anxiety, etc that they are interested in and communicate information about it and how to seek help.

### **High School Level**

**Grade 10 Civics** – *Curriculum Expectation* - Write a letter to your Mayor, MP, Premier or Prime Minister addressing the need for more awareness and funding towards programs addressing children’s mental health. Research the current allocation of funds and programs that address children’s mental health locally or federally.

Resource/Exemplar -

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/canworld10ex/local.pdf>

**Grade 11 Arts** – *Curriculum Expectation* - Scriptwriting – Students create a script that communicates teenagers impressions or lives with mental health challenges.