Supporting Student Mental Health

Educator Conversations with Students and Families During COVID-19 School Closures

Setting the Stage for Virtual Engagement and Learning

During these changing times, educators may be reaching out to students and families to make caring connections. As we move towards classrooms without walls, boards will likely have specific questions to pose to families to work towards building readiness for remote learning through technology. These conversations set the stage for virtual engagement and learning.

At the same time, amidst the uncertainty and worry of the COVID-19 pandemic, this connection with a caring, significant adult outside the home can go a long way to enhancing a student’s sense of wellness and belonging. Hearing from their teacher can remind them of the normal routines and rhythms of school, which may be reassuring and hope-inspiring for them and their families. And so, just like in the regular classroom, when educators connect with students they are also always simultaneously supporting everyday mental health. This happens through good (virtual) welcoming, use of inclusive language, promoting wellness and social-emotional resiliency, and supporting strong home-school relationships. See the Aligned and Integrated Model, Tier One.

Engaging as a “caring adult” is a role that all educators can assume. However, it is very important to recognize that educators are not mental health professionals and should not be expected to conduct Mental Health Check-Ins during virtual conversations with students and their families. Those with specialized training in this area, like school mental health professionals registered with a professional College, are best positioned for this level of connection.

If an educator notes something worrisome about a student’s well-being during the learning-focused conversation, they should seek assistance, as they would if they observed something like this in the classroom. Educators should ensure that they are aware of current board protocols and practices related to referring to school or community mental health services. Having the numbers for Kids’ Help Phone, local crisis lines, and child and youth organizations in your community is also a good practice.

Kids’ Help Phone - Call 1-800-668-6868 or Text CONNECT to 686868.

The ABC’s of Connecting with a Student and Family Virtually During School Closures

**Acknowledge** - this is new, we are finding our way, we all have questions and we are in this together.

**Bridge** – teacher-student relationships from the traditional classroom to a virtual learning environment.

**Connect** – the student to the virtual class, reminding them that they are an important part of the school.

Through the ABC’s, we have an opportunity to reach out to lay the foundation for learning in the virtual classroom, this new classroom without walls. A human connection and conversation, perhaps hearing more about a student’s experiences and listening to questions students and families may have. Reassure parents and students that while we may not have all the answers right now, we will continue to be in touch as we learn more.

For additional resources and ideas visit the School Mental Health Ontario website.