



Strategies to Support a Positive School Climate

General Health

Health is “a state of physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, n.d., section 1). Students develop health-related habits in adolescence that will influence lifelong behaviour patterns; thus, early intervention is crucial to set students on a course for positive long-term health outcomes (Williams et al., 2002).



Why is it important?

- Student health and well-being are impacted by the environment and disciplinary climate of schools (Saab & Klinger, 2010).
- Children spend a significant amount of time at school, making it an important venue to stage health promotion initiatives (Denny et al., 2011).
- By providing health services, safe and supportive learning environments, and involving the community, schools can improve the health and learning outcomes of students (Michael et al., 2015)

In Practice

1. Supportive Learning Environments & Community Involvement

Given that student health and well-being are impacted by the school environment, it is increasingly important that schools take stock of their own school culture and recognize areas for improvement.



What can schools do?

In order to help build healthy schools, staff can look to the following organizations for guidance on promoting student health:

- **Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance:** Canadian standards aimed at providing guiding principles and direction for healthier students and schools.
- **Centers for Disease Control:** In-depth health-related guidelines and practices for schools.
- **Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH):** A comprehensive approach to address the health-related needs of school communities.
- **Ontario Ministry of Education:** A variety of resources concerning the promotion of personal safety, positive learning environments, and healthy food choices.



In the Classroom

Teachers need to build a strong social environment that encourages quality bonds between teachers', students and community.

- Facilitate regular check-ins with students to ensure they feel supported in relation to their health and well-being (e.g., surveys and questionnaires).
- Foster a culture of acceptance and support by modeling empathy, open communication, and respect for diversity.
- Reach out to parents and caregivers to inform them of school policies that support a healthy school environment and post details on school websites and social media.

2. Providing Health Services

For those with pre-existing chronic conditions, comprehensive school health initiatives can provide support to help set them on a healthy path.



What can schools do?

- Ensure students with chronic conditions have the necessary physical accommodations and educational tools relevant to their needs.
- Establish partnerships with the parents and caregivers of students with chronic conditions to develop both a health plan and an emergency plan.
- Align with community-based health services that can link schools with local healthcare and social service programs.



In the Classroom

Though it may seem intimidating, educators can take the following small steps to drive change and enforce comprehensive school health:

- Be mindful of how experiences at school can directly impact student health and wellbeing.
- Develop relationships with parents and caregivers to enable children with chronic conditions to participate as fully as possible in class activities.
- Look after one's own health and well-being to ensure you are modeling healthy practices for students to emulate.
- Structure the classroom environment around safety and accessibility considerations (e.g., space, layout, equipment) and a focus on safe calming spaces (e.g., create a calm down corner or distress zone)

References

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