

#GetReal
about how you feel.

CMHA Mental Health Week

SCHOOL TOOLKIT

HAPPY

AFRAID

SAD

ANGRY



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Mental health for all

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Introduction

Dear Teacher,

It's an understatement, but here it is: the past year has been like no other. And the challenges just keep coming. For you, for your students, for your own kids. Things at home have been out of whack this past year. At school, it's been chaos. But you don't need us to paint the picture: you've been living it.

If you're back in the classroom, it doesn't mean that things are back to normal. Not by a long shot. Remember back to 2020, before March, before the pandemic hit. Things were high stress enough for teachers. It's a high-stress occupation at the best of times.

But here you are, now, on the frontlines of the pandemic, doing what you can to ensure your kids are getting what they need to be well. All while managing your own stress, worries, and even anxiety. This Mental Health Week, we wanted to give you some tools to help the children in your life to feel better. To feel well. We keep hearing that this is the worst pandemic in 100 years. But it is also the worst disruption in a century for a whole generation of school children. Your kids. And their mental health may be suffering.¹

¹ For more information, see CMHA/UBC study.

Things were bad before. The stats vary, but in pre-pandemic times it is estimated that one in six Canadian children would have a mental illness. We need to be fully aware that while mental illness is caused by a combination of biology, psychology and environment, we can often get ahead of it through mental health promotion, mental illness prevention, and by treating it early.²

You don't have to be a mental health expert to do something about your kids' mental health. You just have to be a teacher – or parent – who cares, wants to help and who has the right tools.

² For more information, see Mental Health Week Fact Sheet

CMHA Mental Health Week

CMHA Mental Health Week: #GetReal about how you feel

This year's CMHA Mental Health Week is all about getting real about how we feel. We will do that by getting right up close to our feelings so that we can identify and name them. When we name how we feel, instead of numbing it, we actually feel better. When we name our emotions, we can tame them. Especially the harder ones. The ones we sometimes call “negative”. We may have learned – and taught the kids – some things that just aren't true. Like that focusing on feelings will just make those feelings harder to manage. It turns out that the science says otherwise. In fact, the research is showing that naming how we feel actually changes our brain. And it has other benefits you might not expect.

According to emotion scientist Marc Brackett, the Founder and Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, labeling our emotions also helps us describe what we're going through, which helps us get help from others. We can't empathize without being in touch with how we're feeling ourselves, so this language of emotions helps us provide support that matches what someone is feeling, foster connections, while allowing us to commiserate and solve problems together.

Social and Emotional Learning

You don't need us to tell you that your classroom is flooded everyday with your students' emotions, and that their feelings can be very big. Each of them might be frustrated or sad or lonely; or they might be excited and thrilled, and the sands might shift from minute to minute. It might feel like a constant storm.

Enter Social and Emotional Learning or SEL. It could be your new best friend. And that of your students too. If you're not using it in your classroom yet, you're going to want to start.

You may already be using Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at school, so this might not be brand new. That's great. Stay tuned anyway because we have gathered some engaging and ready-to-go activities you can stage in any classroom, whether virtual or real. Skip to the Activities and put the Mental Health Week theme to work and encourage your students to get real about how they feel. P.S. Name it, don't numb it.

So, what is SEL? It is more than just another education theory you can live without. It's fundamental to teaching children the skills they need to understand and cope with their emotions. And it's not a program or a lesson. Social and emotional learning is as much about how you teach as it is what you teach.

SEL³ helps you apply a different lens to the education of children: the lens of emotions, empathy and positive relationships and it actually improves children's academic success. As well as their overall mental health. They will learn how to calm themselves when they're upset, and how to care and show care for others. It fosters good relationships and good decisions. If that's not reason enough, there are the academic benefits too. An analysis of 207 studies found that children who have SEL in their curriculum, simply do better in school.⁴

And by the way, it's not just for children. It's for teachers; it's for parents; it's even for stockbrokers. It's for everyone.

One of the key elements of Social and Emotional learning is helping children to identify, name, and manage – or regulate – their emotions.

FACT:

When children learn about their emotions for as little as 30 minutes a week, both their behaviour and their academic success improve.⁵

3 M.T. Greenberg et al. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *The American Psychologist*

4 Durlak JA, Weissberg RP, Dymnicki AB, Taylor RD, Schellinger KB. The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Dev.* 2011 Jan-Feb;82(1):405-32. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x. PMID: 21291449. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21291449/>

5 Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., Reyes, M. R., & Salovey, P. (2012). Enhancing academic performance and social and emotional competence with the RULER feeling words curriculum. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 22, 218–224. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1041608010001214>

Have you heard of RULER?

That's another educational acronym you'll want to take on board. It is brought to you by the scientists at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

RULER is a five-step approach to learning skills to build emotional – as well as social and academic – competences. Here's how the acronym breaks down;

R = Recognize emotions in yourself and in other people

U = Understand the causes and consequences of a wide range of emotions

L = Label emotions using a well-developed vocabulary

E = Express emotions in ways that are socially appropriate

R = Regulate your emotions

These are the RULER skills, and you can learn more about them and the Yale approach to emotional intelligence here.

These emotional literacy skills are, in fact, basic skills.⁶

They are as fundamental to the success and well-being of children – and the adults they will become – as language or math literacy, and there only good reasons to incorporate them into your classroom.

⁶ M.T. Greenberg et al. (2003).

Here are some of the positive effects for your students:

- Develop emotional intelligence skills
- Experience fewer attention and learning problems
- Display greater social and leadership skills
- Feel less anxious and depressed
- Become better at solving conflicts
- Perform better and are more engaged academically

Not only do scientists recommend it, so do economists. Teaching nurturing non-cognitive, emotional skills are considered to provide the greatest returns on educational investments.⁷

And we're not forgetting about you. There are tremendous positive impacts for educators and school leaders.⁸

- You'll have more positive relationships
- You'll create warmer emotional climates
- You'll experience lower stress and burnout
- You will become healthier physically and mentally

⁷ Brackett et al.

⁸ Based on an interview with Mark Brackett here: <https://resilienteducator.com/classroom-resources/teaching-eq-ruler-approach/>

Emotions and feeling wheels

Basic Emotions

There are a number of ways to “slice and dice” the emotional spectrum. Theorists do not agree on the number of emotions that are considered “basic.” Dr. Gloria Wilcox said six, Dr. Robert Plutchik said eight, and Dr. Paul Ekman says five. Many now concur with Ekman. The theories continue to develop, though, with Cowen and Keltner saying in 2017 that there are 27 distinct emotions.

Whichever model (or models) you choose to work with, you are helping students to better understand their emotional landscape.

Feeling Wheels

Feeling wheels (of which there are many) are graphic representations of the range of human emotions. These visual aids help teach the emotional basics, develop emotional vocabulary and name feelings. Pick one or pick more than one. Because no matter which you choose, you are doing a great service to your students in helping them develop a rich emotional vocabulary.

Here are a few wheels you could choose from:

Dr. Gloria Willcox's **Feelings Wheel**

Dr. Paul Ekman's **Atlas of Emotions (Not available in French)**

Dr. Robert Plutchik's **Wheel of Emotions**

There are also many other emotion wheels you'll find in your internet travels, including a pizza feeling wheel especially for children [here](#).

Here's a quick rundown:

Dr. Gloria Willcox's Feelings Wheel says there are six basic emotions:

Sad, Scared, Angry, Joyful, Powerful, Peaceful

The Feelings Wheel has been adapted and revised by many, including by Geoffrey Roberts, [here](#): who sees the basic emotions as: Surprised, Bad, Fearful, Angry, Disgusted, Sad, Happy

HINT:

A very useful thing about the Feelings Wheels is that they offer an extensive vocabulary list from which to draw.

Ekman's Atlas of Emotions says there are five basic emotions:

Enjoyment (Happiness), Sadness, Fear, Anger, Disgust

HINT:

Dr. Ekman's **Atlas of Emotions** is presented in an interactive website that could be very engaging for older students. However, it is not available in French.

Plutchik's Model of Emotions says there are eight basic emotions:

Joy, Sadness, Acceptance, Disgust, Fear, Anger, Surprise, Anticipation

HINT:

Dr. Plutchik's model is perhaps too complex for a young audience.

Affect labelling: Putting feelings into words

Scientists call it “affect labelling”. It simply means “putting our feelings into words.” And the science tells us that it’s a great way to equip children – and everyone, really – to get through and manage their strong emotions, like anger and sadness (the so-called “negative” emotions. We’ll get into their bad reputation just a little later.) For now, let’s consider how we can help kids by getting them to put words to how they feel.

When they’re small, children have no trouble telling us how they’re feeling by crying, laughing and, yes, screaming. Slowly but surely, they start to speak, and we teach them the basics: simple words like sad, mad, and glad. When they’re old enough, and they develop more vocabulary, we encourage them to “use their words” instead of acting out their feelings. As teachers, you aren’t necessarily fully briefed on theories⁹ around affect labelling, but you may know intuitively that when children can express their emotional experiences, it helps them navigate their feelings.

The next step in helping kids label their emotions and put words to their feelings is to expand their emotional vocabulary. Having a wide range of descriptive words for emotions gives children a wider understanding of all the things they’re feelings.

Invite your kids to get real about how they feel for Mental Health Week.

9 See Mental Health Week Fact Sheet

Negative emotions: can feelings be “bad”?

We might have been raised with the notion that “negative” feelings are in fact anti-social, and that the best way to deal with them is to push them down. And we may be passing this learning onto our kids. But, in fact, we need to take another look. Psychologists have revealed quite the opposite: now we know that all feelings, good and “bad”, make up the healthy spectrum of human feelings, and that so-called “negative” emotions contribute to well-being.¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/negative-emotions-key-well-being/>
See Mental Health Week Fact Sheet

Activity 1: “All the feels” Word Bank brainstorm

Objective: Identify emotions

Materials: Flip-chart and markers

1

Put up a flip chart and markers.

2

Ask students to name all possible feelings they can think of. Try to generate as long a list as possible. Don't be surprised if it's a very short list. Even adults have a difficult time finding words to describe their feelings.

3

Post the list.

4

Move right into Activity 2.

Activity 2: “What do you feel when?”

1

Generate a list of scenarios to elicit a feeling response from your students: *what do you feel when?*

For instance:

- What are you feeling right now?
- What did you feel when you woke up this morning?
- What were you feeling when you went to bed last night?
- What would you feel if you fell and scraped your knee?
- What would you feel if you got an A+ on an assignment or test?
- What do you feel when you can't come to school because of the lockdown?
- What do you feel when you can't see your friends because of lockdown?
- What would you feel if you weren't invited to a party?
- What do you feel about being picked first for a team?
- What do you feel if you are picked last for a team?
- What do you feel if an adult yells at you?

You can add another layer to the scenario, depending on the age of your students:

- Remember back to a memory of when you were five years old. Then fill in the story: When I was five... this happened... and I felt...
- Remember what happened on your last birthday. Then fill in the story: On my last birthday... this happened... and I felt...
- Remember back to (or pretend that) when the lockdown was over and you went back to school: When I came back to school after lockdown, I felt...

2

Write down all of the feelings that are named in the All the Feels Word Bank. Notice if the list has expanded. Are basic emotions emerging? What are they?

Activity 3: Emojis are us.

Materials: Emoji printout sheet; a pencil or pen

1

Print out and distribute the emoji sheet.

2

Ask your students to identify each emoji's emotion.

3

Ask students to each write a sentence imagining why the emojis feel the way they feel.

For example, always start with “this emoji feels...” Then ask them to add why.

So “This emoji feels mad. She is mad because she couldn’t watch her favourite show.”

Or “This emoji feels happy. He is happy because he got a good mark on the test.”

4

In small breakout groups, and then in the larger group, have a discussion about how you feel when you experience each emotion, and how to cope with that emotion.

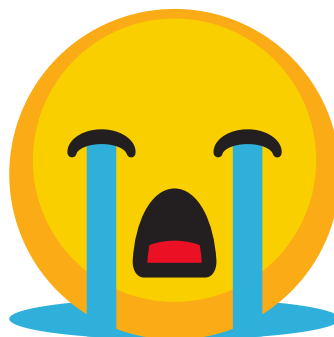
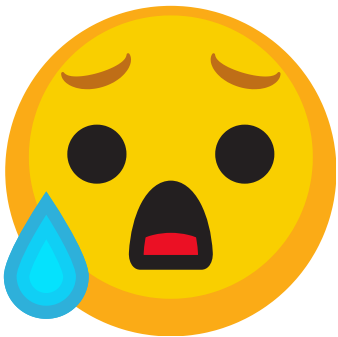
5

Reinforce that it's okay to feel your emotions and it's important to have the words to say how you feel and to talk through your feelings.

We thank CMHA Hamilton for sharing this activity.

Emojis are us.

#GetReal
about how you feel.



Activity 4: The Five Basic Emojis

1

Introduce the concept of basic emotions. Post the five emojis that represent the basic emotions (according to Dr. Ekman's theory) and ask your students to name the feeling each represents.

2

Go back to the scenarios in Activity 2 and ask students to come up with synonyms for each feeling. They can either use a thesaurus or their own knowledge.

So, in the scenario “When you can’t see your friends because of the lockdown you were feeling x.” What are the other feelings/feeling words that would describe this basic feeling?

3

Add these to the “All the Feels” Word Bank.
(Slowly but surely, you are building a richer, shared emotional vocabulary.)

The Five Basic Emojis

#GetReal
about how you feel.



Happiness



Sadness



Fear



Anger



Disgust

Activity 5: Basic Emotions – A Team-based Activity

1

Divide the class into small groups, each one representing a Basic Emotion. Ask them to choose a name for their team and a colour. Then set them loose using whatever tools you give them (whether a Thesaurus, the internet or their own knowledge and experience) to develop a list of words that go with their specific emotion.

HINT:

There are many thousands of “feeling” words in the dictionary and a quick Google search will yield just about as many lists. Here’s one [list](#) we compiled that you can share with your students.

2

Come back into the large group and have the teams report back. Invite each Team to add any new feeling words to the Word Bank.

3

Once the groups have reported back, your “All the Feels” Word Bank will be overflowing with emotional vocabulary. Keep it posted throughout Mental Health Week, and beyond.

Homework activity: Creating a personal word cloud

1

Have students research and choose from among the many free word cloud generators they can find online. ([Here](#) is a place to start.)

2

Using the word bank, have them generate their own list of emotions (their “favourites”) but encourage them to include the feelings they “enjoy” and also the tough ones.

3

Have them input the word list into the Word Cloud Generator online. Ask them to save and send the word cloud to you. If you are in the classroom, you might want to print them off and display them. If you are teaching virtually, you might want to create a PowerPoint presentation to share with the whole class.



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