

Mandatory Mental Health Literacy Modules

GRADES 7-8

Background

As part of the Policy/Program Memorandum 169's commitment to improving student mental health, a series of three 40-minute mandatory mental health literacy modules were created for Grades 7 and 8 respectively through a partnership with School Mental Health Ontario and the Ministry of Education (School Mental Health Ontario, 2023). These modules align closely with the mental health literacy expectations within Strand D of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum as listed above.

Modules

Grade 7 (School Mental Health Ontario, 2023)		
Module	Key learning	Alignment with YWC
7.1 Mental Health, Mental Illness, and the Relationship Between Them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental health and mental illness are two separate yet connected concepts.• Mental health is something we all have. We all want good mental health for ourselves and those we care about.• There are many perspectives about mental health and mental illness. They are concepts that can vary across cultures.• Many factors may influence and support our mental health. They can be different for each of us.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Through the YWC program, students learn about the mental health continuum/spectrum and how mental illness and mental health can exist separately or in conjunction with one another.• Students learn about the various risk and protective factors that influence mental health.• The YWC Program focuses on mental health promotion for the whole school community.
7.2 Understanding Signs of a Mental Health Problem and How to Seek Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are strategies that can support our mental health. It's important to have different options available to fit different situations and people.• Noticing changes in your mental health can help you know when to use strategies that work for you.• Getting help when you need it is also an important strategy to take care of your mental health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• YWC encourages students to become aware of their mental health and incorporate positive coping strategies.• Several mental health promotion initiatives are implemented to meet the diverse needs of the school community.• Additional professional mental health resources are provided during YWC training. <p><i>Module continues on next page.</i></p>

Grade 7 (School Mental Health Ontario, 2023), con't.

Module (SMHO)	Key learning	Alignment with YWC
7.3 Mental Health, Substance Use, and the Relationship Between Them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance use can affect each of us differently. When we are younger (age 25 or less), some substances (e.g., cannabis) can have particularly negative effects on our brains because they are still developing. • Our mental health can play a role in substance use and substance use can negatively impact our mental health. • We can seek support for substance use problems the same way we seek support for mental health problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YWC training provides an overview of the association between mental health and substance use. • Risk factors associated with mental health and substance use are also reviewed along with stigma. • Additional professional mental health and substance use services are provided during YWC training.

Grade 7 Curriculum expectations

Expectations and skills	Alignment with YWC
Substance use, addictions and related behaviours	
D1.2 Demonstrate an understanding of linkages between mental health problems and problematic substance use, as well as between brain development and cannabis use, and identify school and community resources (e.g., trusted adults at school, guidance counsellors, public health services, help lines) that can provide support for mental health concerns relating to substance use, addictions, and related behaviours	The YWC Program provides a comprehensive review of the association between substance use and mental health problems. Risk and protective factors are identified. RNAO also provides a list of professional support resources for mental health and substance use.
Mental health literacy	
D1.6 Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between mental health and mental illness and identify possible signs of mental health problems	YWC Program training provides a detailed overview of the spectrum of mental health and mental illness. Common signs and symptoms of mental illnesses and poor coping are reviewed so students are better able to recognize possible signs of mental health problems.

Grade 8 (School Mental Health Ontario, 2023)

Module	Key learning	Alignment with YWC
8.1 Mental Health and Stigma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is still stigma related to mental health and mental illness in our society. • This stigma can negatively impact how we talk about mental health and mental illness, how we treat people experiencing mental illness, and how comfortable people are seeking support. • Our word choices can contribute to stigma and even cause harm, or they can empower others, create openings to share experiences, and support seeking help. • The words we use not only influence how we make others feel, but how we feel as well. • There are additional actions that can help reduce stigma too, such as showing kindness, compassion, and empathy for other people’s feelings and experiences; respecting what is different and unique about each of us; and educating others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through YWC, students learn about mental health and stigma that exists in society. • Through YWC, students learn about stigma, how attitudes, beliefs, and words can lead to stigma and how this impacts individual wellbeing. • By learning more about mental health, mental illness, and stigma, students increase their mental health literacy. • The implementation of mental health promotion activities, the ongoing open discussion surrounding mental health, and peer-to-peer support can lead to a reduction in stigma.
8.2 Supporting Our Mental Health: Managing Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We all feel stress at times. Some stress is a good thing! It can help us in many ways. • Managing stress is a skill we can practice and get better at. There are strategies that can help. • Different strategies may work at different times, so it’s important to have a few options available and to practice them regularly. • When we don’t get a break from stress – like stress related to experiencing racism, bullying or poverty – it can impact our mental and physical health. When that starts to happen, it’s time to seek more support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth learn through YWC how mental health impacts everyone • Information regarding stress and its impact on mental health, as well as the importance of positive coping strategies are reviewed • Implementing mental health promotion activities school-wide can contribute to an improvement in mental health. • Additional professional mental health support resources are also reviewed and provided. <p><i>Module continues on next page.</i></p>

Grade 8 (School Mental Health Ontario, 2023), con't.

Module	Key learning	Alignment with YWC
8.3 How to Help a Friend: Seeking Support for Others While Caring for Ourselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We may play an important role to play in supporting our friends. • Sometimes we need other people to play a role, too. We don't have to manage our concern for a friend all alone. • Even if our friend asks us not to, we need to seek support from a caring adult right away if there is a risk to their safety or anyone else's. • It's okay to prioritize our own mental health while we are helping a friend. Our mental health matters, too. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The YWC Program is built on the foundation of being a youth-led, peer-facilitated support program: by increasing their understanding of mental health, youth are better equipped to discuss these topics and provide support to their peers. • Additional professional mental health support resources are also reviewed and provided.

Grade 8 Curriculum expectations

Expectations and skills	Alignment with YWC
Mental health literacy	
D2.4 Demonstrate an understanding of how incorporating healthy habits and coping strategies into daily routines can help maintain mental health and resilience in times of stress	The YWC Program emphasizes the importance of incorporating healthy habits and coping strategies to promote mental health. Several mental health promotion activities can be implemented within the school to encourage students to adopt healthy habits and prioritize mental wellbeing.
D3.4 Explain how word choices and societal views about mental health and mental illness can affect people and perpetuate stigma, and identify actions that can counteract that stigma	The YWC Program training helps students recognize the stigma associated with mental illness and substance use. YWC focuses on increasing mental health literacy to reduce stigma and improve mental health outcomes.

Reference: School Mental Health Ontario. (2023). Overview for School Mental Health Professionals. Retrieved from: <https://smho-smso.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/MH78-Implementation-SM-HP-overview.pdf>

Updated February 2025