



Manitoba Pandemic Support Guide

Caring for Students

“You can’t stop the waves but you can learn to surf.”
— Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn

“But . . . it’s easier to learn to surf if you have a surfboard,
a coach, and a lifeguard.” — Dr. Michael Ungar

Whether students are learning in classrooms or from their homes, Manitoba’s school and divisional staff continue to work in partnership with families and caregivers to have a positive impact on students’ overall well-being.

Background Information: Building a Common Understanding

Stress is a normal part of the human experience and each of us—children, youth, and adults—will respond in our own unique ways. The Mental Health Commission of Canada has created a continuum model that shows how all human beings experience mental health on a continuum from “healthy” to “ill.” You can view this continuum at the following links:

English: <https://theworkingmind.ca/continuum-self-check>

French: www.espritautravail.ca/auto-observation-du-continuum

There are a number of factors that contribute to where we are on the continuum at any point in time. These factors are described as “risk factors” and “protective factors.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all being exposed to increased risk factors. Examples of this include things such as disruption to our routines, loss of social and recreation activities, changing dynamics in our homes/with our families, and the continually evolving nature of health and safety information.

There are many things we can do to create a sense of comfort, stability, and safety in our learning environments. This will help to take care of students’ mental health and to mitigate the impacts of the uncertainty and changing nature of the pandemic.

Focus on the Fundamentals: Putting First Things First

“Children are great imitators. So give them something great to imitate.” — Anonymous

Meeting our basic needs is fundamental to well-being. This includes a sense of connection/belonging, sleep, nutrition, and physical well-being (health and safety). Each is a critical “protective factor.” Together, these fundamentals are the “surfboard” we need to stand on to build our resiliency against the “waves” of life’s stressors.

Because education is a field focused on caring for others, everything we do to take care of ourselves is an act of caring for students. This series of support guides includes *Taking Care of Yourself*. If you haven’t read it yet, please consider doing so.

Staff working in schools have the opportunity to model behaviour that is kind, compassionate, and calm. When we model self-regulation, it is soothing for students and it teaches them how to regulate themselves.

Your Contributions Matter: Every Staff Member Plays a Role

“Anyone who does anything to help a child is a hero to me.”
— Fred Rogers

All School/Divisional Staff

Every school/divisional staff member contributes to caring for students in a meaningful way.

One of the most direct ways that all staff in schools can focus on the fundamentals is to work intentionally to build connections with children and youth on an individual level. Doing this on a regular/daily basis provides predictability and structure for students.

Staff members who work in roles with more direct contact with students have additional opportunities to care for them during this pandemic. Teachers are the “coaches” in Dr. Ungar’s surfing analogy, and they have the opportunity to support students through the explicit use of social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies. Educational assistants (EAs), under the direction of certified professional staff, also provide critical SEL support to students.

Every school in Manitoba has a Safe Schools Advisory Committee composed of adults who bring various perspectives to strengthen the group. The committee’s role includes planning for the comprehensive school health perspective and supporting students in realizing their full potential as learners and as healthy, productive members of their community. Including a comprehensive school health perspective within a whole-school approach emphasizes that planning for safety is addressed alongside related initiatives, such as the following:

- healthy relationships
- school-based mental health
- diversity
- school-based suicide prevention and intervention
- digital citizenship and cyber-safety

More information about *Safe and Caring Schools: A Whole-School Approach to Planning for Safety and Belonging* can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/whole_school/whole_school_approach.pdf.

When More Support is Needed: Schools Can't Do it All

"Teachers cannot be all things to all people, and there are other professionals trained to support teachers' concerns when required." — Kevin J. Cameron et al.

While teachers and other certified professional staff can be "surf coaches," there will be times when students require more help. In Dr. Ungar's analogy, this is the time to call in the "lifeguard," who has more specialized training in meeting students' mental health needs.

Your school/divisional team has expertise and resources to support you in meeting the needs of your students. Together, a plan can be created to limit anxieties, reduce stress, and assist students with meeting their needs. This may involve referring students/families to divisional services (clinicians) or to supports in the community.

If you think a child is being harmed or neglected, contact Child and Family Services at 1-866-345-9241.


Note: If it is an emergency, contact your local police emergency number. For more information, visit www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/index.html.

Resources

Guidance Education Outcomes

There are many ways teachers in Manitoba classrooms support SEL. The link below is to the Manitoba Education document that outlines Kindergarten to Grade 12 curricular learning outcomes that focus on SEL. Making time to emphasize these compulsory learning outcomes during the pandemic will benefit students.

www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/mb_sourcebook/outcomes/index.html



Many schools in Manitoba are using specific programs designed to support SEL in the classroom. Even if your school is not currently using one of the programs listed, the resources available online may be helpful. Some of these include the following:

Sources of Strength

Sources of Strength is “a best-practice youth suicide prevention project designed to harness the power of peer social networks to change unhealthy norms and culture, ultimately preventing suicide, bullying, and substance abuse.” Its website includes useful resources for managing COVID-19, including a new Early Years program.

www.sourcesofstrength.org

Thrival Kits

This Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) website has videos to further support skills for well-being and mental health.

<https://mbwpg.cmha.ca/>

Project 11

This classroom program teaches skills such as practising to focus the mind, increasing self-awareness of feelings and strengths, and building positive relationships. The Project 11 website has resources to support your well-being and mental health.

www.projecteleven.ca/

In addition to your school division’s guidance counselling and/or clinical services (i.e., social work, psychology, etc.), some helpful online resources include the following:

Manitoba Professional Learning Environment (Maple)

The following Maple groups offer ideas, resources, and supports:

- Supporting Student Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic
- Mental Health and Well-Being
- Guidance and Counselling

<https://mapleforem.ca>

School Mental Health Ontario

Student Mental Health Action Kit

This website includes resources for students, parents and caregivers, teachers, school system leaders, and mental health professionals to use in supporting student mental health during COVID-19.

English: <https://smho-smso.ca/>

French: <https://smho-smso.ca/accueil/>

Mental Health and Well-Being British Columbia

Erase Stigma, Embrace Understanding

This British Columbia provincial government website is a resource for teachers to help students build skills and knowledge to contribute to their well-being.

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase/mental-health

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Trauma-Informed School Strategies during COVID-19

"This document uses the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's *Creating, Supporting and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework* to consider how, in the time of COVID-19, schools can adapt or transform their practices by using a trauma-informed approach to help children feel safe, supported, and ready to learn."

www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/resource-guide/trauma_informed_school_strategies_during_covid-19.pdf

Finally, teachers and educational support staff can also support students by encouraging them to ask for help when it is needed and by sharing (with students themselves, or parents/caregivers, as appropriate) which supports are available outside of their school. Some of these include the following:

Kids Help Phone (KHP): 24/7 support

Call a counsellor: 1-800-668-6868

Text CONNECT-686868

Live chat: www.kidshelpphone.ca

Stress Hacks

This website was created for Manitobans with resources for youth, families, and educators. Stress Hacks provides information on what stress is and how to manage it.

www.stresshacks.ca

Youth Mental Health

This is a Canadian-based and youth-driven site that is connected to

www.teenmentalhealth.org. It provides resources specifically designed for youth.

<https://jack.org>

Resources to Share with Families

Family Doctor

Should students or their parents/guardians have questions or concerns, or if they are seeking information about potential mental health and stress-related responses or worries that seem bigger than they can manage, contacting their family doctor is a great place to start. The student's health care provider may be the best person to assist in finding the right resource. If the student doesn't have a family doctor, there is a program to help them find one. Students aged 15 and younger need their parents/guardians to use the Family Doctor Finder. If students are 16 or older, they can access it on their own.

www.gov.mb.ca/health/familydoctorfinder/

Mental Health Crisis and Non-Crisis Regional Contacts across Manitoba

Each of Manitoba's Regional Health Authorities offers child and adolescent mental health supports. This website lists crisis lines across the province, as well as an interactive map to help you find your regional health authority.

www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh/crisis.html

The Strongest Families program

The Strongest Families program provides

- evidence-based services to children and families seeking help for mental health and other issues affecting health and well-being
- timely care to families by teaching skills through its unique distance coaching approach, supporting families over the phone and Internet in the comfort and privacy of their own homes

Programs are designed to support children and youth from 3 to 17 years of age. Referrals are made through the student services administrator in your school division or your regional health authority.

Find more information about the program at <https://strongestfamilies.com>.

References

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Rogers, Fred. *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember*. Hachette, 2003, p. 145.

Ungar, Michael Dr., *Resilience Research Centre*, 2021, <https://resilienceresearch.org>.