

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our learning about literacy and mental health, we have been using a series called *Well Aware* that combines engaging texts written by award-winning Canadian authors with lessons that connect to strategies students can use on a daily basis to manage stressful situations.

One of these texts, titled *Upside Down*, is a first-person account of a family's experience with a serious mental illness. Two of Clem Martini's brothers were diagnosed with schizophrenia. Clem felt overwhelmed and wondered, *What can I do? How can I help?* In this text, he offers answers he has found to those questions over the course of his family's journey with mental illness. It has been a difficult journey, including the devastating suicide of one brother. Ultimately, however, the message is one of hope and of finding ways to be resilient and move forward. Everyone who reads *Upside Down* will be affected by the story it tells, and we hope this will lead to deeper understandings, reduced anxiety about mental illness, and compassion.

As students work with this text, they will discuss and debunk misconceptions about mental illnesses and explore coping strategies that are helpful for individuals and families experiencing difficult situations. They will consider ways to support themselves and others when facing tough challenges—especially the important step of seeking and accepting help.

As caring adults, we all want to help our young people develop the skills necessary to be able to cope and thrive in all situations. As teachers, we cannot diagnose or counsel students about specific mental health issues. What we can and will do, however, is open the doors to talking about mental health issues without shame, stigma, or judgment.

As part of our team, thank you for connecting with us concerning this important topic and please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this work further.

Sincerely,