

Consider these suggestions as you assess what students have learned and how they are reacting to the texts. As you read aloud and invite initial responses, keep the following in mind:

**Look for**

- attention (bright eyes, nodding heads, sadness, window-gazing, inattention)
- obvious interest (or lack thereof) in hearing the text or seeing any illustrations
- focus or distractibility
- understanding or confusion reflected in body language
- positive or negative attitude

**Listen for**

- sounds of engagement (laughter, sighs, groans)
- questions
- “What ifs” and “Yes, buts”
- comments that indicate understanding or confusion
- informal conversations about the text after the read-aloud
- talk about the story and related issues
- connections and reflections
- thoughtful silence
- “Read it again!”

**Talk about** (in discussions, “grand conversations,” chats, or conferences)

- questions you and your students have about the text
- images brought to mind by the text
- thoughts that were aroused
- possible responses
- connections and reflections
- patterns that emerged

**Notice**

- who chooses the text for independent reading
- who uses something from the text in their writing
- who responds to the text in what way
- who chooses another text that is somehow related (same series, author, genre, etc.)

**Setting up your classroom:**

- Limit distracting visual and auditory stimuli. Aim for a calm and peaceful feel.
- Keep clutter under control. Model effective organization.
- Group noisier activity spaces and quieter ones so they do not interfere with each other.
- Have a special place for student-teacher or student-student conferences.
- Be flexible with seating arrangements and consider when students might need a place for calm and focused thinking or small-group work.
- Choose your transitioning signals carefully (e.g., a quiet drum, a subtle bell, music).
- Have a predictable (but flexible) routine to help students anticipate and prepare.
- Have available fidget toys or worry beads for calming.
- Keep track of triggers for hypo- or hyperactivity and make modifications to facilitate self-regulation.
- Create a safe and caring environment where students feel they have ownership.

**Fostering emotional regulation:**

- Familiarize yourself with resources on emotional self-regulation (e.g., CASEL, Edutopia, the Canadian Safe School Network).
- Encourage and reinforce cooperation, collaboration, tolerance, respectful behaviour, and kindness. Trust matters!
- Introduce relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, mindful awareness, and yoga.
- Modulate your own emotional responses and share how you do it.
- Help students to express their feelings using the directing, relating, and expressing functions of language (see pp. 27–31 of this resource).

**Strategizing to enhance focus and attention:**

- Be consistent in teaching and learning techniques and scheduling so students can anticipate, get prepared, and focus accordingly.
- Teach goal-setting and planning strategies directly.
- Build up attention span by eliminating unnecessary interruptions and providing appropriate breaks.
- Watch for indications of the need for some help, and indicate that students need to develop appropriate help-seeking strategies. Ask students to consider what they can do when they are stuck, confused, or need more information.
- Help students develop methods to self-monitor (e.g., lists, folders, sticky notes).
- Look for ways to make learning fun, motivating, and engaging.
- Provide concentration spots where students can go if they need extra quiet or limited distraction when working on something in particular.
- Deliver complicated instructions in more than one mode. Check for understanding.
- Give choice and ownership.
- Make sure that your demonstrations and modelling are clear.
- Help students develop personalized mnemonics that match their learning style and preferred modality.
- Aim for engagement. Motivation increases and self-regulation becomes easier.

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

We are starting a new literacy and mental health series called *Well Aware*! We will be reading interesting books written by exemplary Canadian authors. As we work with these books, we hope to come to understand more about how to be happy and healthy, make good choices, and reduce stress and anxiety. We also expect to improve our literacy skills.

The intent of this series is to use the skills of language, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, to address important ideas about positive mental health. The mental health of all of our children is critical to their social and emotional development, but it also plays an important role in their success at school.

Exploring ideas through literature is not new and it is not meant as an “add-on” to an already full curriculum. It is simply a way to use the strength of communication skills as a vehicle to help children not only manage and cope with their everyday lives, but also to “be the best they can be,” physically, socially, intellectually, and emotionally.

As with all curriculum initiatives, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this exciting new resource.

Thank you for your interest!

Sincerely,

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our learning about positive mental health, we are learning to apply the skill of **active listening**. Ask your child to tell you what this means and how it is helpful.

Have a look at the lists below for ways to practise active listening skills. Tips that help all of us make our conversations more meaningful:

- **Eye contact:** Turn off and tune out all other media. Focus on the speaker.
- **Body language:** Nod, open your arms, and share the same “space” (e.g., sit down to reduce a height difference).
- **Pass it back:** Try statements that begin with *Are you saying that ...; So what you are telling me is ...; Oh, that must have felt ....*
- **Acknowledge:** Let others know you “hear” what is said.
- **Ask questions:** *What does that look like? feel like? sound like?*
- **Agree to disagree:** Let others know that you may not always agree with what is said, but that you both need to respect opinions.

Questions that help open the doors to communication:

- *Wow! You look excited! What’s up?*
- *I can tell that you are (sad, stressed, upset) by the expression on your face. Let me know if you want to talk about it.*
- *If you had to change one thing about the way today went, what would it be? Why?*
- *What’s something that you really enjoyed about school today?*
- *Did you experience a feeling of calm today at some point? What were you doing? What do you think made you feel calm?*

Thanks for your interest!

Sincerely,

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Reread *My Best Friend ... NOT!* and look for the different sources of stress that Rina experiences. You can also note stressors that you have experienced. Make brief notes about how you felt or reacted in those situations.

Source of Stress	For Rina	For Me	Feeling or Reaction
Starting school			
Starting a new activity (club, team, arts program, etc.)			
Moving to a new house or school			
Making new friends			
Wondering if I will be accepted by other kids			
Fighting with my parents			
Fighting with my brother or sister			
Fighting with a friend			
Wearing the right clothes, shoes, etc.			
Being left out or not chosen			
Not being good enough at a subject or activity			
Adults not listening to me			
Having to make difficult decisions for myself or others			
Ending an important relationship with a friend			
Bullying in person			
Cyberbullying			
Doing something that I was not comfortable with because of peer pressure			
Parents giving me too many jobs and responsibilities			
Death of a pet			
Personal injury or health issue			
Speaking up in class (public speaking)			
Threat of violence in school or community			
Dealing with a big change in my schedule			
Not getting enough sleep			

Name:

The way a writer or speaker describes someone can help you understand the underlying message. With a partner or group, choose a character or person in the selection.

1. Write down at least five different words and phrases in the chart below that describe or tell about this character or person.
2. Think about each word or phrase. Decide if it shows something good (+), bad (-), or neutral (=) about the character. Circle the symbol you choose.

Descriptive Word or Phrase	+	-	=
	+	-	=
	+	-	=
	+	-	=
	+	-	=
	+	-	=

3. Look at the words and your ratings. How do you think the writer wants you to feel about this character or person? Give evidence for your answer.

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4. What message do you think the writer wants you to get? Explain your reasoning.

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Dear Parents/Caregivers,

We have been learning about ways that we can recognize and address everyday stress. As an important connection to our learning in this area, we have included some ideas for you to help your child develop skills, attitudes, and behaviours needed to communicate effectively and to nurture good relationships with peers, friends, and family. Please think of this as a “Post-it” note that can be a helpful tool for promoting positive family discussions.

**Conversation Starters:**

- *What was the highlight of your day? Why?*
- *Teach me something you learned today that you think I might not know.*
- *What word would you use to describe how you are feeling right this minute?*
- *How can you tell if someone in our family is stressed?*
- *Tell me some things you’ve learned about how to react responsibly when something is bothering you.*

**Tips to Help Your Family De-stress Together:**

- Go to the park.
- Play charades or a board game together.
- Hike, bike, picnic, drive .... Just get out for a while!
- Have a one-on-one chat to air a concern.
- Put notes for discussion in an anonymous suggestion box and address them at the time that is right for you.

**Tips for Recognizing When a Family Member is Stressed:**

- Changes in behaviour, such as not wanting to participate
- Too much “alone time” in another room
- Crying, moping, lack of eye contact
- Too many excuses not to talk
- Lack of contact with friends
- Not wanting to go to school
- Acting out—unusual behaviours

Thank you for your interest!

Sincerely,

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Challenges/ Stressors</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Message</b>
Clara Hughes					
Gilmore Junio					
Josh Cassidy					
Jennifer Botterill					
Daniel Igali					

What was similar about the athletes profiled in *Striking a Balance*?

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What was different about them?

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If you could be one of these athletes, which one would you like to be? Why?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Record how many hours per day you spend on the activities listed by your class.

<b>TOTAL</b>									
Sat.									
Fri.									
Thurs.									
Wed.									
Tues.									
Mon.									
Sun.									
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>									

Name:

**Something I would like to do (or be) \_\_\_\_\_ years from now:**

Share your goals with a partner.

Have you created a “balanced” plan? Are any changes necessary?

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Do you have a Plan B in case this doesn't work out? What is it?

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How would you recover from the following situations? Present your responses using drama, perhaps in a short scene. Read your situation and then act out your response.

- 1) Yemi was in a funk. Nothing was going right. He had tried out twice for the “Rep” soccer team and didn’t make it. He was so down he just wanted to stay in his room and play video games. “I guess I am just not good enough,” he thought.
  
- 2) Summer had a gymnastics meet coming up, but she had gained some weight since the trials and she was sure her coach wouldn’t be happy. “Maybe I will just pretend I am sick,” she thought.
  
- 3) Chris and Meghan had not been speaking for weeks. It all started when Chris started saying mean things about Meghan’s mom to everybody. The rumours escalated to the point where Meghan just didn’t want to go to school.
  
- 4) Amanjeet and Maninder were first cousins. Both of them had a real talent for drawing. For the school art show, they both submitted their drawings and, as usual, Maninder won first prize, and Amanjeet came in second. “I might as well quit,” said Amanjeet. “I will never be better than Maninder.”
  
- 5) Will and his mom had just moved from their small but comfortable home on the reserve to an apartment in the big city. His mom said it was going to be an exciting new experience for both of them, but Will missed his friends, his school, and his cousins. “I guess I have to do this for Mom,” he thought, “but I will never feel like this is home.”

Name: 

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Interview your partner by asking the following questions. Take notes that will help you write a profile of your partner.

- What is your full name?
- Where were you born?
- What is your favourite hobby or pastime? How did you get interested in it?
- What is your favourite subject in school?
- If you had to name one thing that you are good at, what would it be?
- Who would you say is your personal hero and why?
- If you could be good at anything in the world, what would it be and why?
- What do you want to be or do when you are an adult?
- Is there anything else that you would like people to know about you?

Once you have interviewed each other, you may prepare your profile in the form of a story, report, electronic presentation, computer-generated newspaper article, poster, or any other form that will highlight the information you have learned about your partner.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Choose one of the three situations below and draw a comic strip with five frames.

Frame 1: Illustrate how the person feels.
Frame 2: Illustrate the person's poor response before thinking.
Frame 3: Illustrate how the person calms down.
Frame 4: Illustrate the person's action once he or she is calm and thinking the situation through.
Frame 5: Illustrate how the person feels after responding appropriately to the situation.

**Situations:**

- George has what his mother calls “a short fuse.” He gets angry easily and often does something that causes him to get in trouble. One day last week, George came home to find Eric, his younger brother, playing with his Space Wars collection. George could feel his stomach tighten and his hands forming into fists. He was so angry that he wasn't sure what he would do.
- Malik couldn't stand it any longer. Deepak had been teasing him about his new haircut for days and he felt like he was going to explode. He could feel his jaw tighten when he saw Deepak coming around the corner. It seemed like his face was heating up and his heart was beating like a drum. He had to put an end to this now!
- Kree and Cara had been friends since first grade. Lately though, Kree had started hanging out with Sal, and Cara was not only feeling left out, she felt angry that Kree would abandon her. Every time she saw Kree and Sal she felt like running away. Her chest hurt and she felt like crying. She just couldn't take it anymore. It was time to do something about it.

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When you are finished your comic strip, think about how you might have reacted in this situation before you calmed down and then after you took time to pause and think.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Before I listen, I get ready by \_\_\_\_\_

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2. While I am listening, I help myself pay attention and remember what I hear by

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3. After I listen, I show appreciation to the presenter by

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Presenter's Name	Topic	Message (an important idea I learned from the presentation)

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**Read the following situation in your group and discuss this person's life balance. What problems can you foresee if she continues this way?**

Kerry is one of those people who wants to be everybody's best friend. She is kind, caring, and a great listener. Unfortunately, two of her good friends are not getting along at all and Kerry feels stuck in the middle. If she sides with one, she may lose the other. It is bothering her so much that she can't sleep. If only they could just get along. Then she could be friends with everybody again!

**Read the following situation in your group and discuss this person's life balance. What problems can you foresee if he continues this way?**

Jamal is really good at video games. He has achieved level 5 in Space-Crash and none of his friends are even close to that. He is even two levels higher than his brother, who is three years older and always wins at everything. He really wants to get to level 8 so he spends all of his spare time before school, after school, and even under his covers in bed (his mom doesn't know) playing the game. If he can get to level 8 he will be a Champion!

**Read the following situation in your group and discuss this person's life balance. What problems can you foresee if she continues this way?**

Kayla has made it to the school finals in the "Go to the Top Spelling Challenge." This is the first time that she has been in the finals for anything and her mom and dad are so proud. Getting to the finals was easy but to make it to the next level she will really have to practise, practise, practise! That means going online every night and looking up words and memorizing the different meanings and spellings. Her friend Lorena has invited her to a birthday party this weekend but she told her she couldn't go. She has to make the school board team, or everybody will be disappointed. No, for Kayla there is only time to work!

**Read the following situation in your group and discuss this person's life balance. What problems can you foresee if he continues this way?**

Mikhail just wants everybody to leave him alone. He needs to concentrate on his dance. He knows he is good, but he wants to be better. At 12 years old, he actually has a chance to audition for a major theatre production, and nothing was going to get in his way! He isn't hungry, he isn't thirsty, he doesn't want to go to the museum or the pool or anywhere else that his dance troupe leader wants everyone to go. He really wants to ace the audition and he just wishes everyone would leave him alone!

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

We have been reading an engaging text called *Sink or Swim* by Marty Chan. Among other things, this text helps us to learn the importance of “balance” in our lives.

In our work with the text, students have had the opportunity to consider how balanced their day-to-day routines are when it comes to factors like eating habits, sleep time, exercise, media time, and so on. As a frame of reference, experts suggest that kids spend no more than two hours of screen time per day and that they balance that with at least 60 minutes of physical exercise every day.

### **Easy Action Ideas**

- Add music to daily chores such as the dishes, tidying up, and taking out the garbage. Dance your way through them!
- Build a snowman, set up a back yard obstacle course, or challenge your child to a race up the stairs.

### **Moderate Media**

In today’s world, kids and adults alike are connected to some form of media for large portions of their day. As parents and caregivers, we need to know what media kids are using, how much time they spend on them, and who they are connecting to. Here are some ways to help your child enjoy media in a balanced and healthy way.

- Play a video game with your child so that you know the content, their level of involvement and how much time they are spending with it.
- Listen to the music your child listens to. Talk about the ideas expressed in it.
- When using the computer, explore websites together. Teach the importance of never sharing any personal information, never befriending someone they haven’t met face to face, and letting you know if they ever feel threatened or see something online that upsets them.
- Set up cellphone and texting rules together.
- Discuss cyberbullying and remind your child to think of it as if the person were standing right in front of them. It is easy to put someone down when you can’t see them or hear any response. A guideline is to ask yourself the following question before writing anything in a message: How would I feel if I received this?
- Remind each other that “play” refers to outdoor active fun too, not just onscreen games.

Thank you for your interest!

Sincerely,



Dear Parents/Caregivers,

We are having a celebration and YOU are invited!

As you may have heard from your child, we have been working with a text titled *Welcome to the Circle*, written by Canadian First Nations author Larry Loyie with Constance Brissenden. Please feel free to visit the website at [www.firstnationswriter.com](http://www.firstnationswriter.com) to learn more about this book and the array of other books this author has written.

Among other exciting learning opportunities, this text and the accompanying lessons remind us of the importance of connecting to and learning from our friends, neighbours, and families. As part of our efforts to make all children and their families feel respected, welcomed, and appreciated, we are having a celebration and we are asking for your help.

On (date)\_\_\_\_\_ at (time)\_\_\_\_\_, you are invited to join us at (location)\_\_\_\_\_ for an hour of celebration, stories, and cultural expression.

Please read the form below and indicate if you can attend and whether you would like to share something with us. Then return it with your child and we will begin planning our celebration! Please note: There is no need to bring anything. This is just an invitation to do so if you wish.

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I will / will not be able to attend the celebration. (please circle)

The number attending will be \_\_\_\_\_.

I will bring an artifact, item of clothing, story, or picture to share. (if so, please describe)

\_\_\_\_\_

I would like to speak to the children and share a story, tradition, or other information that is important to our heritage. (if so, please describe)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Thanks so much. We look forward to learning more about you and your family!

Sincerely,