

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,

Imagine that you write an advice column to help readers your age with difficult problems. Choose one of the letters below and write a response giving advice that you think would help the person cope with the situation.

Letter 1

Dear Advice Columnist,

My parents seem really stressed out lately. No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to do anything right. It feels like they're always mad at me. Some days, when school is over, I don't even feel like going home. I don't know how to make things better. Can you help?

Marek

Letter 2

Dear Advice Columnist,

Callie has been my best friend for four years now. We hang out together all the time, and she's always there for me when I need her. Last week, Callie told me that she and her family will be moving to the other side of the country. I just don't know how I'm going to cope without Callie. What advice can you offer?

Amanda

Letter 3

Dear Advice Columnist,

I've always been tall for my age, and during this past year I've had a growth spurt. Now I'm the tallest person in my class. I never minded being tall—it came in handy when playing basketball—but now some of the kids in my class have started teasing me and calling me names like "Towering Tanya." Sometimes I catch myself trying to slump down to appear shorter, but I know that's bad for my posture. I feel like I'm starting to lose my self-confidence. What should I do?

Tanya

Follow the steps below to conduct a talking circle.

Step 1: Sit to form a complete circle.

Step 2: Choose a leader for the talking circle. The leader will start the conversation and make sure that the discussion goes well. A good leader is respectful and fair.

Step 3: After the leader has finished, the person seated to the left of the leader has a chance to speak. Move around the circle in a clockwise direction until everyone has had a chance to speak.

Talking Circle Guidelines:

- Give your full attention to the person who is speaking. Be respectful.
- Don't interrupt a speaker. Wait until it is your turn to talk. Don't speak to other members of the circle when it is someone else's turn to speak.
- Don't take up too much time when it's your turn to speak. Make sure there is time for everyone to share their thoughts.
- The talking circle can end when everyone has had a chance to speak. However, if time allows, you can go around the circle again so people have a second chance to speak.
- If you don't wish to speak when your turn comes, you can say "Pass."
- Make sure your comments are truthful and sincere.
- Respect people's privacy by not sharing their thoughts outside the talking circle.

Instructions

- Use the guidelines below to create a comic strip with five frames. (If you want to use more than five frames, make adjustments to the guidelines.)
- For the characters, you can use stick figures, avatars, or even superheroes.
- Use speech balloons or thought balloons for text your characters say or think.
- The purpose is to show how a coping strategy can be used to help manage a problem. Your comic strip should be clear, helpful, and show a coping skill that could work in a real situation.

<p style="text-align: center;">Creating a Five-Frame Comic Strip</p>	<p>Frame 1</p> <p>Identify the situation. You can use words, illustrations, facial expressions, and body language to make the problem clear.</p>
<p>Frame 2</p> <p>Indicate that the situation is stressful for the character involved. Along with spoken words and thoughts, think about visible signs that could help to show that the character is feeling stress.</p>	<p>Frame 3</p> <p>Show the character considering some coping strategies that might be helpful in the situation.</p>
<p>Frame 4</p> <p>Show the character using one of the coping strategies from Frame 3.</p>	<p>Frame 5</p> <p>Show how the character feels after applying the coping strategy.</p>

Name: _____

Use this graphic organizer to record information about the character you are focusing on.

My character: _____

Important Events	How the Character Feels	How the Character Responds

Name: _____

Read the situations below.

1. Franco and Leon have been friends for years. Leon left for a two-week vacation. A few days later, Leon's friend Nick got an email from Leon, but Franco didn't. Franco was upset.

Franco's Assumption: "Leon doesn't want to be friends with me anymore."

2. The coach of the soccer team encouraged Ming to try out for the team. Ming worked hard to improve her soccer skills before trying out. After the tryout, she thought she'd done okay. Later, she learned that she didn't make the team. Ming was devastated.

Ming's Assumption: "The reason I didn't make the team is that the coach doesn't like me."

3. Jay got his hair cut much shorter than usual and he was nervous about how people would react. As he walked down the hall at school, he noticed people staring at him.

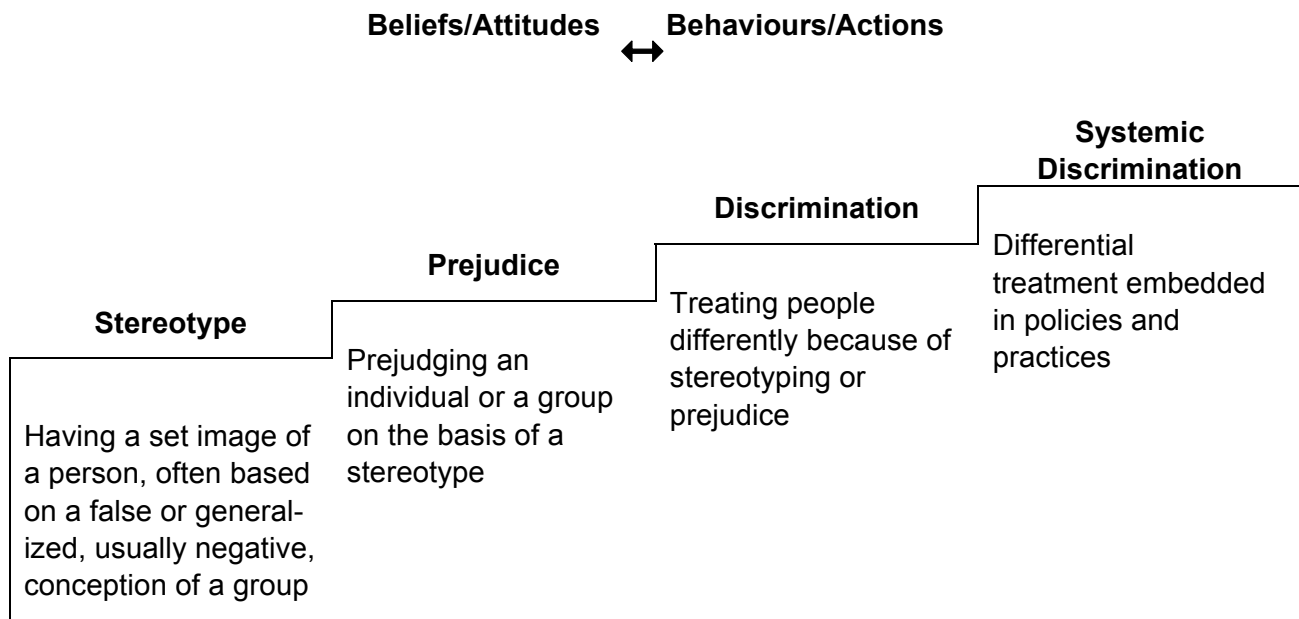
Jay's Assumption: "They're staring at me because they don't like my hair."

For each of the situations above, answer the following questions.

- a) What (if any) evidence might support the assumption?
- b) What other reason(s) might explain the situation?
- c) What is a reasonable and more positive thought the person could have about the situation?

The graphic below illustrates the relationships between beliefs/attitudes and behaviours/actions.

Stereotypes and prejudice can lead to discrimination, and discrimination can help to perpetuate stereotypes and prejudice.



From Ontario Human Rights Commission document—*Supporting Bias-Free Progressive Discipline in Schools* © 2013, p. 13, Ministry of Education website at www.ontario.ca/education © Queen's Printer for Ontario

Discrimination involves treating someone unfairly based on factors such as age, ethnic origin, religion, gender, or disability, and resulting in disadvantage or harm to that person. This result may be intended or accidental, but it qualifies as discrimination in either case. Discrimination might involve obvious and direct action or it might involve more subtle practices that disadvantage or harm individuals or groups.

Name:

You are not required to share your work on this page with anyone else, though you may if you like.

1. Describe a situation in which you would lack self-confidence.

2. What are some negative thoughts you might have about yourself in this situation?

3. What strengths do you have that would help you deal with the situation? Choose one or two strengths and describe how you could use these to help you deal with the situation.

4. What positive messages could you give yourself to improve your self-confidence and feel more able to deal with the situation?

Name:

Here are some reasons why an activity might make you feel happy:

1. It makes you feel like you are having fun and enjoying yourself.
2. It is so absorbing that it makes you lose track of time.
3. It makes you feel like you are doing something meaningful or something that gives you a sense of purpose.
4. It gives you a sense of accomplishment.
5. It makes you feel like you are part of a group and valued by the group.

Based on M.E.P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2011.

In the left column of the chart below, record some activities that make you feel happy. In the right column, use the numbers from the list above to record why the activity makes you happy. You can write more than one number for each activity.

You can also include activities that you would like to try and why you think those activities would make you feel happy.

Activity	Why It Makes Me Happy

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our learning about literacy and mental health, we have been using a series titled *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 *The Only One*, is an autobiographical account of the author’s experiences growing up feeling like she was “the only one” in several ways—she was the only child she knew who had allergies, wore glasses, and had an adopted sibling. Most significantly, she was the only Black child in her neighbourhood and at school. The book explores the author’s journey from struggling with the challenges of being different to embracing all the qualities that make her a unique individual.

As students work with the text, they will explore various factors that contribute to a sense of identity and learn to value the qualities that make them unique individuals. They will also learn to develop self-confidence by relying on their strengths to help them cope with challenging situations they encounter.

Recognizing and valuing cultural heritage contributes to a person’s sense of identity and sense of well-being. To help your child understand and value his or her cultural heritage, you could

- talk about your family’s cultural background
- point out any ways in which your family life reflects your cultural heritage (for example, foods, traditions, celebrations, and customs)
- explain what your cultural heritage means to you

It would also be helpful if you could share with your child any situations you know of in which people demonstrated constructive ways of dealing with discrimination based on factors such as age, cultural background, or gender.

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,

The Why We Came

- What does the narrator mean when he says “Been scared so long / Don’t know any other normal”?
- What is the narrator talking about when he refers to “the stomping of boots / And the banging at the door / In the middle of the night”? What inferences can you make?
- Why would the narrator feel guilty that he and his family escaped from Iraq?

When We First Came

- What words would you use to describe how the narrator is feeling in this section? Why does he feel these emotions?

Who We Are

- What clues in this chapter suggest that the narrator is having trouble adjusting to life in his new country?
- The narrator reads the “big fat book” to make it look like he’s not jealous. What is he jealous of? Why? Do you think he chooses a good strategy for dealing with this situation? Why or why not?

Carlos and Marley

- In this chapter, where do you see the narrator successfully coping with challenges? What does he do to cope with each challenge?

Bacon and Weirdness

- What events and situations cause the narrator to feel stress in this section? How does he try to cope with each one?
- On page 18, the narrator says, “if you try to give / Any sort of explanation / They think you’re on the side of the terrorists.” Why would people think this?

In the TV Store

- The shoppers don't realize that the narrator and his family are laughing at the cartoon. What might be another reason why the shoppers think the narrator and his family are laughing at the attack?
- The narrator copes with his anger by writing a poem for Carlos and Marley. What do you predict he wants to tell them? Why do you think so?

Not Guilty

- This section presents the poem the narrator writes to Carlos and Marley. What emotions did you feel while reading this poem? Why did you feel those emotions?

Done

- After the bombing at the race, Carlos and Marley react very differently to the narrator than the shoppers did earlier. How would you explain these two very different reactions?

Name: _____

Read the strategies for managing stress. Put a check mark beside the strategies you have used.

- _____ Do some deep breathing or try another relaxation exercise.
- _____ Talk to a friend or trusted adult or write in a journal to express your thoughts and feelings and help you “get things off your chest.”
- _____ Do something you enjoy.
- _____ Do something that is a normal part of your routine, such as taking out the garbage or straightening up your room.
- _____ Take a warm, soothing bath or shower to relax.
- _____ Listen to your favourite music, play an instrument, sing, or dance.
- _____ Watch a funny video or trade jokes with a friend.
- _____ Get some exercise, such as walking, swimming, or playing catch.
- _____ Look after some small tasks that are on your “to do” list.
- _____ Think positive thoughts. Consider difficult situations as opportunities to learn and grow.
- _____ Make sure you are getting enough sleep during times of stress.
- _____ Play with a pet if you have one—or play with a friend’s pet.

Based on SAMHSA, “Dealing with the Effects of Trauma: A Self-Help Guide.” pp. 5–6

List any other strategies you find helpful for managing stress.

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our learning about literacy and mental health, we have been using a series titled *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 *Not Guilty*, tells the story of a boy who immigrates to Canada with his family to escape the Iraq War. The boy copes with the challenge of adjusting to a new school by finally making two friends in his class. When the media covers attacks by Muslim terrorists, the boy experiences prejudice from people who assume that he and his family support the attacks because they are Muslim. He fears that he will lose his new friends, thinking that they, too, will react to him with prejudice after the terrorist attacks. When he returns to school, he is relieved to find that his friends still see him as an individual and do not show any prejudice towards him.

As students work with the text, they explore the issues of stereotypes and prejudice. They learn about the importance of seeing people as individuals and the harm that can be done by applying negative stereotypes to people and making judgments about them that are not based on their individual characters.

Recognizing and valuing cultural heritage contributes to a person's sense of identity and sense of well-being. To help your child understand and value his or her cultural heritage, you could

- talk about your family's cultural background
- point out ways in which your family life reflects your cultural heritage (for example, foods, traditions, celebrations, and customs)
- explain what your cultural heritage means to you
- talk about how everyone has the right to be treated fairly

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,