

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 by 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,