

What is positive mental health and why do I have to address it?

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*"Reading, Talking and Thinking About Mental Well-Being"*

*"What is positive mental health and why do I have to address it?"*

*Linda Millar, Teacher's Resource Author, Well Aware Series:* At this point you may be asking, "Why do I, as a classroom teacher, need to address mental health?" Let's take a look at what some Grade 6 students have to say about what causes stress in their world.

*On screen text: What kinds of things cause stress for people your age?*

*Student standing in front of a word web with "Stress" in the centre:* So again, school, homework, bullies, and your siblings, sports, peers, like, other people swearing at you and bullying you, dance competitions, jealousy with your friends. And, like, even when you get in fights with your friends or arguments, you get stressed out. What if they don't like me anymore, and what if, like, not my friend anymore.

*Another student explaining different "Stress" word web:* So studying and test marks, your parents getting, like, get really tough on you if you get a bad mark. And also the due dates and, like, deadlines for when, like, a project is due. Also social media if there is side bullying going on, and your career.

*Another student explaining different "Stress" word web:* Our group also decided on school because for tests and homework and "Am I going to get it done in time?" Also sports because, like, say for dance you can't get a move and then you get really stressed out over that. And also if you get an injury you don't know long it will take for you to recover. Also sicknesses, like, if you're sick or if someone else is sick and you don't want to, like, catch their cold or, like, whatever their sickness is. And fights with your friends because, like, what Ryan said, like, are they liking me anymore? Are we still going to be friends, and also quick decisions, because you don't know if you're going to make the right one.

*Linda Millar:* Now let's see what these students have to say about the term "mental health."

*Text on screen: What do you think is meant by the term "mental health"?*

*Linda and students in classroom.*

*Linda:* So this is what we're going to talk about. In mental health I'd like you to think that an alien has come to visit you from Mars, and the alien has heard the word mental health so much lately because it's been in the papers, and it's been in the news, and it's been on the TV, and the alien says, "Okay, so I don't understand what this whole thing about mental health is, and I'd like you to share that with me." So I want you to be thinking about in your groups what you think a definition would be for mental health.

*Student:* So the definition that we got is "Mental health is a standard position in which your brain functions or operates in and handles in different situations." And examples are emotions, instincts, and

reactions. And mental health can also involve diseases-- in the brain cancer and brain damage.

*Student:* Mental health is everything that goes on in your brain, and stress can have a big impact on it. And it can cause mental breakdowns and other mental health issues.

*Linda:* Wow thank you very much. I'm really impressed with all of the definitions that you had. I'm sure that the alien will be heading back to Mars with a much better understanding about what mental health is. What I really liked was many of you made a connection between what happens in the mind and what happens in the body, and I think that that's really important. You know, we don't have any trouble talking about when we're feeling physically ill. You know if we have a headache or we had a stomach ache, or we're just not feeling well, we can talk about that easily. Sometimes it's more difficult for us to talk about what's going on in our mind. So it's important for us to start talking about that and to start putting labels and names on the feelings that we have that are going on in our head that ultimately affect our body, our mind, and our spirit or the way that we live and the way that we are.

*World Health Organization logo on screen with Linda's voice over:*

Interestingly, the World Health Organization defines positive mental health as - *text on screen:* a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

Research also reminds us that health is a state of complete physical, mental, social, and spiritual wellness, and not just the absence of disease or infirmity. And let's not forget that there is a strong correlation between student achievement and mental health. In fact, child psychologist Dr. Patrick Carney relates...

*Dr. Patrick Carney, Author of Well Aware: Developing Resilient, Active, and Flourishing Students:* The link between mental health and student achievement is really interesting. The-- now that we do have good science, we do have good research that talks about the links between those two things, and that is summarized and you can go on our website, the CASEL website C-A-S-E-L; it's a collaborative for looking at social-emotional learning. And on that website, they talk about the evidence that when you teach self-regulation skills and social-emotional skills that students have better health and better achievement both at the same time. And the schools now, with the last few years, the big efforts to have students--more students--be successful, have higher graduation rates, have more people meeting provincial standards. As teachers have gone after that, the wall they talk about is the wall of students with mental health difficulties that when you have mental health difficulties in the way, the so-- so difficult to get to achievement success. So if you're sitting in class really, really sad about what's going on in your life, or you're sitting in class really, really anxious about things, you can't focus, it's just so logical. And we can say now the research bears that out. You can make correlations easily between mental health and achievement that it's done in many, many studies.

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*Linda Millar:* So the research is clear: mental health is important and we need to talk about it in our homes, in our schools, and in our community. So the next question might be, "How do we connect positive mental health to our existing curriculum and what does it look like in the classroom?" To see the various components of "Well Aware," please view video number 2. And to see "Well Aware" in the classroom, please see videos 4, 5, and 6.

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