

November 2, 2015

Dear Teachers and Parents/Guardians:

Children in grade six are currently receiving the KIDS (Knowledge, Issues, Decisions, Supports) Program, taught by an Elementary School Resource Officer, with the Brantford Police Service. KIDS is operated by T.I.C.K. Inc. (Teaching Intelligent Choices to Kids), formerly D.A.R.E. Brantford Inc. The KIDS curriculum was created by the Ontario Provincial Police, in partnership with educators and mental health professionals. One of the integral components of the KIDS curriculum is mental health awareness, and with this in mind we thought you may want to know more about the information we are delivering to your children.

Mental health is part of our overall well-being and relates to our ability to enjoy life, maintain fulfilling relationships, and cope with adversity and stress. It gives us a sense of spiritual, social and emotional well-being.

There may be times, however, when we experience mental health problems in which our thinking, mood, and behaviour limit our ability to function successfully in parts of our daily lives.

Some mental health problems are mild and temporary. Others can be more serious, last longer, and require specialized and intensive treatment. Mental health problems can affect anyone, regardless of age, education, or social position. The first signs often appear in childhood or adolescence

Throughout the curriculum, students are taught living skills that provide a strong base for their future mental and physical well-being. These are skills that give a person a positive sense of self, that help them form and maintain healthy relationships, think critically and creatively, solve problems, and make wise decisions. Learning and talking about mental health can increase understanding of mental health issues and reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems. Key things that students learn across the curriculum include:

- understanding mind-body connections and the role of physical activity in supporting mental health and overall well-being
- understanding factors that contribute to emotional well-being, recognizing sources of stress, and developing the adaptive, management, and coping skills needed to deal with adversity and stress
- developing self-awareness and the ability to recognize warning signs of emotional difficulty, and understanding how to respond to them and seek support
- developing communication and social skills and the ability to identify and build healthy relationships
- understanding possible connections between substance abuse, addictions, and mental health, and knowing how to get help
- understanding the causes and nature of mental illness and ways of reducing the stigma and stereotypes associated with it

Routine interactions with children provide them with much of the psychological support they need, but there may also be times when it is important to talk to them directly about mental health issues. These situations may arise if a child, or someone close to them, is showing signs of mental health problems.



Starting these conversations is not always easy, but the following tips may help:

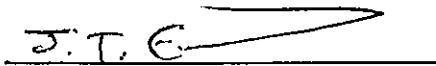
- Help them describe their emotions (e.g., "You look like you feel sad. Saying good bye can be hard. I feel sad too.")
- Look for opportunities to talk informally in a relaxed setting.
- Let the discussion develop gradually over time rather than trying to cover too much in one conversation. Children may need time to become comfortable talking about their concerns.
- If children are uncomfortable speaking directly about their own feelings and experiences, approach the issues indirectly. Talk about imaginary situations or about characters in books or television programs.
- Let them know that you are there to talk and help, and that their mental health, like their physical health, can change over time.

If your child seems to be struggling with a mental health disorder, he or she can be referred to a mental health professional for further assessment and treatment. Ask your child's teacher if she or he has noticed behavioural changes, and discuss ways in which the school might provide support. Check with your family doctor about possible medical reasons for changes in behavior or emotions.

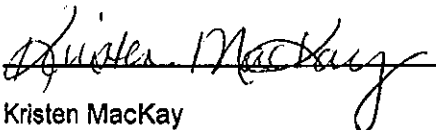
Yours truly,



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