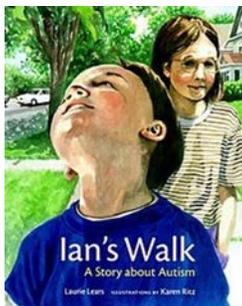


Welcome back from a well-deserved break. I hope 2016 is off to a great start.

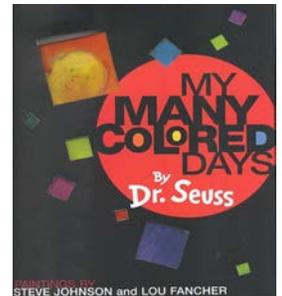
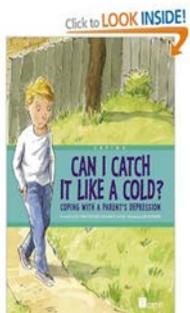
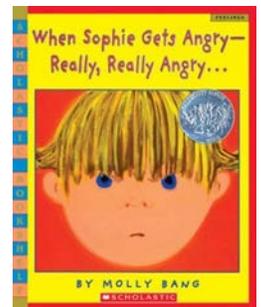
In this month's newsletter you will read about how students and staff bring mental wellness to life. We hope it inspires you to bring mental wellness to life in your school/work setting and at home. Feel free to tell us "What's on your Wellness Board?" so we can share it in future editions. On January 27, "mental health will be on everyone's lips" - it's Bell Let's Talk Day. A number of our schools will be participating in various activities. What are you planning to do in your school? On March 2, Young Women on the Move is celebrating International Women's Day by hosting an event for girls in Grades 3-6 and their mentors themed "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...Developing A Healthy Reflection". We have another exciting announcement....On April 16, our Mental Health and Well-Being Parent Partnership Committee is co-planning with MSIC, SEAC, PIAC and other advisory committees, a joint Parent Conference that will include workshops and presentations on a variety of topics including mental health and well-being. The theme is "Parents as Partners"...Save the Date!

(By: Sandy Spyropoulos, Executive Superintendent, Student Support Services and Care)

### Bibliotherapy: Helping Children to Cope with Real-Life Situations



Educators are well aware of the power of books to enhance students' educational experiences and personal growth. Reading is important to a child's development and is a safe way to expose children to different situations; to help them realize that they are not alone in their experiences; and to develop problem-solving skills. The use of literature to help children understand themselves and face challenging experiences that may arise at different points in their lives is referred to as bibliotherapy. The use of bibliotherapy is surrounded with controversy as some deem it a therapeutic approach that can only be utilized by trained professionals while others define it as simply sharing a book to help readers cope with personal issues. Teachers do not need to get tangled in this debate although there are important factors to consider when using books in the classroom to open a discussion on an emotionally difficult topic which may be impacting students' lives. Most importantly, books should be matched to the students' maturity level and to situations that may be personally meaningful as this promotes emotional involvement with the story and allows readers to empathize with the characters in the book. Important factors to consider when choosing a book in addition to the students' developmental and interest level, is whether the book models healthy coping skills and leaves readers feeling hopeful about a positive outcome. Depending on the developmental level of students, discussions about the book may be supplemented with the use of art and drama to illustrate the main theme, to role-play solutions to the presenting issues and to help students reflect on what



was read and to relate it to their life experiences. An extension activity may include a bookmaking project where students can work individually or collectively to author a book that documents and illustrates the insights they have gained from the topic covered. It goes without saying that it is important to read a book through before sharing it with your students, and to introduce the topic gently, especially if it is a sensitive issue currently affecting students, such as the death of a loved one. Having said this, it is equally beneficial and perhaps less threatening to introduce emotionally sensitive topics to help children cope with difficult life situations before they encounter such experiences. Books may be used to model positive attitudes and build empathy should such situations arise in students' own lives or in the lives of their friends and loved ones. Furthermore, books may serve to foster an inclusive classroom environment, as teachers continually strive to meet diverse student needs, ranging from learning disabilities to mental and physical health concerns. When working with students to accept individual differences and challenges, it is important not to discuss an individual student's unique needs without prior consent from the student and parents/caregivers. In this instance it is also good practice to suggest other supports to the student and family. It is also important to know the students in your class well and to look for any significant reactions to the material covered as these may be an indication that the student may benefit from additional support, either through school-based professional services or external agencies. Overall, bibliotherapy is an interactive and engaging way to foster self-awareness and introduce helpful coping skills for various real-life situations. Some sample books, consisting of fiction and non-fiction titles, suitable for children and adolescents are provided here. For a complete list please contact Iolanda Scarcello at [iolanda.scarcello@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:iolanda.scarcello@tdsb.on.ca).

(By: Iolanda Scarcello, Social Worker, Area B)

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Iaquinta, Anita and Hipsky, Shellie (2006). Practical bibliotherapy strategies for the inclusive elementary classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 34(3), 209-213.

Lok, Cindy (2009). Book Therapy: The power of picture books for an inclusive classroom. *The California Reader*, 42(2), 24-28.

Rozalski, M., Stewart, A., and Miller, J. (2010). Bibliotherapy: Helping children cope with life's challenges. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 47(1), 33-37.

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## HOW CLASSROOM SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING CAN BE SHARED WITH A WHOLE SCHOOL

### “Problem Scale” and Self-Regulation

Each day The Grove School begins outside with caregivers, parents, teachers, and children all together in a circle. The topics and processes are different, but the point is often the same, to come together to speak, listen, and learn.

This fall the grade 2 class from the school presented at circle, their learning on conflict resolution and social-emotional regulation.

Weeks before their presentation, the students read strength-based resiliency books, based on best practices in the field of psychology. The books use self-regulation techniques and are based in cognitive behaviour therapy to help children identify their emotions and responses.

The students made a huge “problem scale”, based on the smaller ones they already used in their classrooms. The “problem scale” slid from a small problem, to a medium size problem, to a big problem.



Students introduced this scale to their school. They explained that there are small problems, medium size problem, and big problems. They asked people to step into the circle if they had ever had a SMALL PROBLEM. Everyone stepped into the circle. Then they asked people to step into the circle if they had ever had a MEDIUM SIZE problem. Everyone stepped into the circle. Then they asked people to step into the circle if they had ever had a BIG PROBLEM. Everyone stepped into the circle. This exercise brought to light the idea that everyone has challenges and obstacles in their lives.

The students explained that when we have challenges, we can rate our problems. For example, some students rated that a MEDIUM SIZE problem is when two people want the same book, while for other students a MEDIUM SIZE problem is when they have to read out loud in front of their class.

A goal in the presentation was to explain that as we gain an understanding of what bothers us, we can begin to examine our feelings, thinking, and behaviour.

The students explained this by stating that different size problems have different related emotions. The students placed emotion words on the “problem scale”. They placed joyful, near SMALL PROBLEM. Then they placed upset, near MEDIUM PROBLEM. Finally, they placed furious near BIG PROBLEM. This helps the development of an emotional vocabulary and to understand that there is a range to emotions.

Children then explained that if we examine the way we THINK we can sometimes change the way we FEEL. When we have helpful thoughts, they move us through hard times. If we think that we “can do it” we begin to be less upset about a situation. Yet if we think that “it is too hard” we can become more upset. Students gave examples of MEDIUM SIZE problems that they face every day and the unhelpful or helpful thoughts that could make their problem bigger or smaller. For example, one student explained that when he thought that it was unfair he then tended to get more upset.

The students then explained that when we are so upset our thinking brain just shuts down. Students took turns explaining what they do, in class or at home, when their “blood is boiling” and their “body can’t stop moving.” They gave examples of body calming techniques that help them slow their bodies down. Students demonstrated push-ups, breathing slowly, yoga moves, and stretches.

Since the school-wide presentations, other teachers in the school started to use the common language. This offered the students usable strategies to adopt when challenges or conflicts arise.

(By: Joey Mandel, Grade 2 Teacher, The Grove Community School)

My name is Kevin and I am in SK. I did a morning announcement with 2 of my friends for mental health week. I was very excited. My part was “You close your eyes and take a deep breath in and out.”



Kevin also told us that “we are doing a lot of talking in our class about how the different body systems work and how we can be good to our body”. (By: Kevin J., SK, Norway PS)

## A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To Well-Being!

The *Happiness-at-School* Project is a joyful learning experience that began in 2013 at North Kipling Junior Middle School. It uses stand-up comedy to promote mental health and well-being literacy through positive psychology and laughter, which are often missing from many students' learning experiences. It is a one-of-a-kind project, a Canadian first!

Sue Stephenson, former Principal and author of *"Kidding Around: Connecting Kids to Happiness, Laughter, and Humour."* is the creator of the Project. Sue and two professional comedian-coaches, Kyle Woolven and Marc Hallworth, ran a series of four workshops with students in three of our Grade 7 classes. One activity involved using the Pixar movie, *"Inside Out"* to introduce the value of different emotions in our lives, beyond joy. We recognized that problems and stress are part of our lives and one way to deal with these is through comedy – turning problems into punchlines.

In stage one, students wrote comedic scripts about personal stories from their lives. It was a literacy learning experience as students wrote drafts, performed, got feedback, revised and edited several times, until their script was good-to-go. "Writing for performing" is a different challenge from "writing for reading". After performing for their classes, sixteen budding stand-up comedians were chosen to go onto stage two and rehearse for an intermediate assembly Showcase.

The Stand-Up Comedy Showcase on December 7, 2015 was the culmination of three months of playful work. This was not a contest. It featured a variety of diverse student personalities. To laugh at comedy on TV or in movies is one thing, but to write and perform stand-up comedy about yourself in front of others is a totally unique experience. Here are a few student comments from the post-survey following the completion of the project:

- "I learned that I don't have to make fun of someone to make them laugh." (Tanish)
- "It helped people talk about themselves." (Gandrav)
- "Every bad or good thing can be turned into something funny." (Daniel)
- "I learned a lot about handling stress, taking moments to be mindful and also staying happy." (Ishani)
- "It brought a lot of positive vibes to our school and was a big stress reliever." (Karan)
- "I learned that being sad, angry, afraid, etc., is part of being happy." (Hailie)
- "I learned different ways to be happy." (Terrance)
- "I learned that there are many ways to relieve stress and be happy and making the best of what I've got and being at peace with it." (Harleen)

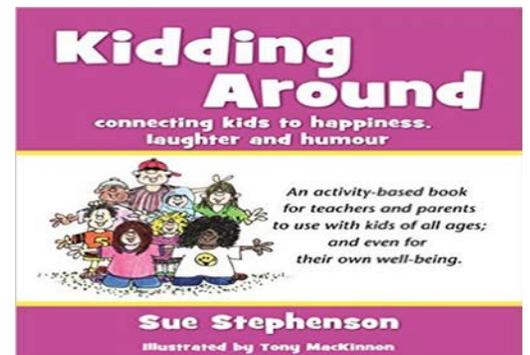
Some of the curriculum connections below demonstrate the project's relevance to students' learning and skill-building. Students were able to:

- develop high-level language skills (oral and written);
- build resiliency through mental health and well-being;
- develop character strengths, including creativity, gratitude, humour and play; and
- experience the value of stand-up comedy skills that help turn problems into punchlines.

A sincere thanks to our Principal, Alex Tracey, and the other Grade 7 teachers, Shannon Patterson and John Morrone, for their spirit and commitment to this innovative Project. This Project would never have been possible without the dedicated collaboration of the entire team. We also appreciated the amazing response from local media that covered our Showcase. We hope other schools benefit from participating in this project as much as we did. (By: Douglas Cornell, Gr. 7/8 Teacher, Intermediate Chair, North Kipling JMS)



North Kipling JMS student being interviewed about the Happiness at School Project by a CTV reporter



### We've gone public!

You can now access the Mental Health and Well-Being Belongs to Us Newsletters on the TDSB's external website. To view all issues, past and present, please visit: [www.tdsb.on.ca/mentalhealth](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/mentalhealth) - click on "Newsletter"

### We Want to Hear from You

Do you have great Mental Health and Well-Being initiatives in your school or department? If so, we want to hear from you. Please send us your written submission (500 words), pictures, students' written work, or art work that you would like to highlight. To access the submission form please click here: <https://surveys.tdsb.on.ca/index.php?r=survey/index/sid/136182/lang/en>

## Bringing Wellness to Life - Women's Self Defence

Eighteen young women and I had the amazing opportunity to participate in a women's self-defence program called Wen-do. Wen-do is Canada's oldest women's self defence organization and is available to any woman despite shape, size or ability that is over ten years old. The goal of the program is to provide women with a sense of safety, confidence and peace of mind through physical and verbal self-defence techniques, as well as sharing and hearing success stories of other women. Through the Wen-do program, I've learned to be more sure of myself and the power, purpose and potential I possess.

Our instructor, Deb Chard, did an outstanding job presenting the basic Wen-do program to us. She put us in a non-competitive, safe and fun environment and made doing Wen-do extremely riveting. Her positive energy was highly contagious, and her ability to explain things in depth so everyone could understand was appreciated immensely. I left Wen-do both days feeling empowered and strong, as if I could take on anything the world had to throw at me. I could feel myself walking taller with my head higher and the people around me noticed it too.

I feel that Wen-do also made a positive impact on the relationships between the girls in the program. Being in a room with eighteen other girls sounds intimidating, however, when we all came together to learn Wen-do, we all laughed and had a great time together. Wen-do has given us all a connection to each other and our shared experience; I feel a sense of belonging with a group of people I wouldn't have gotten to know otherwise. My experience with Wen-do has left me awestruck and I tell every woman in my life about the amazing power that just one Wen-do class has had. I highly recommend this course to any and every girl, regardless of whether they think they're capable or not. In all honesty, I never would have thought I was that strong come the final class. Thank you so much to the amazing women who run Wen-do and to all the people who made this possible.

(By: Destyne Shvhtahal, Grade 9 Student at Birchmount Park CI)



Students at Birchmount CI participating in a Wen-do class

## North Toronto C.I. Sleep Pledge

Do you get as much sleep as you want? Do you get as much sleep as you need? Most people would answer "no" to the first question and "I don't know" to the second question because they may not really know if they are in fact getting as much sleep as their bodies need. Public Health Ontario references the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in the USA stating that teenagers require 9-10 hours of sleep a night (2015). Most of us would guess that most of the young people we know are not getting anywhere near 9 hours of sleep a night. That's why at North Toronto C.I. the NT Wellness group has begun to focus their wellness efforts on sleep, helping their student population feel rested, alert and ready to take on whatever life throws their way, by having students volunteer to take a 'Sleep Pledge' as part of their Healthy Sleeping Campaign.

As part of the pledge students are asked to sleep at least 8 hours a night 5 nights in a row (ideally Monday to Friday), and track how much sleep they get, how they feel, and compare it to how they usually feel with less than 8 hours of sleep a night. Students from the NT Wellness group will be making classroom visits to educate their peers on the benefits of good sleep for their physical and mental well-being and ask them to take the pledge. Gabe from NT Wellness says that he hopes that by taking the pledge, students will feel the benefit to their physical and mental well-being from the realization that they can become better students and people in general once they get a good night's sleep. They are asking those taking the pledge to share their experiences via their personalized twitter handle in hopes that it will promote good sleep for all, increase physical and mental well-being and a stronger more caring school culture.

(By: Saleem Haniff, Social Worker, Mental Health and Well-Being – System Support)

Reference

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Berenbaum E, Wu JH-C. Evidence brief: Effects of inadequate sleep on the health of 0-19 year olds. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2015.

Feeling tired?  
Do you get less than 8 hours of sleep?  
Why not take the NT Wellness Sleep Pledge.  
Sleep 8 hours for 5 nights in a row!!!!  
#8h5n

**FEELING TIRED?????**

Take the NT Wellness Sleep Pledge.  
Join our Healthy Sleep Campaign.  
Sign the pledge during HFM Visits on Jan 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

NT WELLNESS

## What's on Your Wellness Board?



### Mental Health and Well-Being Core Leadership Team

Heather Johnson & Saleem Haniff, Social Workers, Mental Health and Well-Being – System Support  
Rose D'Alimonte – Chief of Social Work/Attendance – Area D  
Marcia Powers-Dunlop, Interim Senior Manager – Professional Support Services  
Sandy Spyropoulos, Executive Superintendent – Student Support Services and Care  
Leslie Fox, Executive Assistant – Student Support Services and Care