

Webinar Transcript : Promoting Mental Health and Wellness in the Classroom

- [Susanna] All right, everybody. Good afternoon and welcome to LD@school's second webinar for the 2022-2023 school year. My name is Susanna Miller and I will be your moderator this afternoon. If anyone on the line is experiencing any technical difficulties at this time, please contact the LD@school team using the Q&A box, which you'll see in your menu there, and we will do our best to assist you. After the webinar today, we will be sending out the presentation slides, a link to the survey to provide us with some feedback on the webinar. And the webinar recording will be available on our website in approximately three weeks after we have a chance to closed caption and transcribe it for accessibility purposes. Once that link to the recording is available, we will be sending an email to everyone who's registered, so you'll be the first to know that that is available. If you would like to have a copy of the slides right now and not have to wait until tomorrow, you can do so by visiting our Padlet. And I will put... You can see the URL in the top there, but I will put the link in the chat as soon as I stop talking. If you have any technical questions during the presentation, please contact the LD@school staff member using the Q&A function. And once our presenter has finished his presentation today, we'll be opening up the floor for any questions. So during the course of the presentation, you can enter any of your questions for either the presenter or any technical questions in that Q&A box. So without any further ado, the LD@school team is very pleased to welcome our guest speaker, Justin Heenan, whose presentation this afternoon is entitled, "Promoting Mental Health and Wellness in Today's Classroom." The Ministry of Education has funded the production of this webinar. So please note that the views expressed in this webinar are the views of the presenter and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Education, nor the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. We will also be tweeting throughout the webinar. So if you'd like to participate, you can send us a tweet by using our handle @LDatSchool, which is right at the bottom of the screen there, or by using our hashtag that we use during all our webinars, #LDwebinar. So that takes care of all of our housekeeping for the afternoon, so let's jump right into the presentation. But first, I'd like to welcome Justin Heenan, who will be our presenter today. So Justin is a special education classroom teacher, a registered psychotherapist, and a course instructor at Trent University. He's passionate about mental health in schools, literacy, physical education, and intellectual developmental disabilities. He's an active volunteer with the Special Olympics in Durham region and the Durham Down Syndrome Association. In 2021, he was the recipient of the Special Olympics Ontario Educator of the Year Award, yields a bachelor's degree in French and Spanish from Queens University, a bachelor of education from Trent University, and a master's degree in counselling psychology from Yorkville University. So welcome, Justin, the floor is now yours.

- Thank you very much for that introduction. I am going to share my screen here. And yes, so welcome to my presentation. As Susanna had mentioned, it's titled, "Promoting Mental Health and Wellness in Today's Classroom." And I really wanna focus today on today's classroom because over the last several years with COVID and now what's being called the COVID fallout, our classrooms do look significantly different than they did just several years ago. So I wanna

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keep that in the front of your minds through this presentation, specifically how we can support our learners with learning disabilities and special needs, again, in today's classroom. So, our agenda for today, we are going to start off by looking at wellness for educators. The reason being is because if we are not well ourselves, then our students can't really be well in the classroom. So I place a high emphasis on this, specifically on strategies that we can use as educators to support ourselves and then in turn support our students. Secondly, we're going to look at how we can set up our students for success in the classroom, specifically what we can do for those learners with special needs and how we can set them up for greater success to help them reach their full potential. We're then going to look at how we promote mental health and wellness in general, but with, again, that focus on our learners with special needs. I am very passionate about mental health. As a psychotherapist myself, I think it's very important that educators pull different strategies to help reduce that stress, anxiety, and negative behaviour in the classroom. So that's what we're going to look at next. And then, finally, one of the biggest challenges that I think educators face is a lack of resources in various areas. Obviously, educators are asked to do a tremendous job, lots of things and lots of students to support, but where are the resources? So I also want to focus on where to find resources that are easily implementable and effective in supporting mental health wellness for our learners, again, in today's classroom environment. So the reason why I wanna start with wellness for educators is simply that, again, if we are not well, our students cannot depend on us. So we need to model that wellness, and that positive, those positive health choices in order to support our students. But a lot of people have very good wellness practices that sometimes fall by the wayside, right? As educators, we're so focused on how can we help the kids. How can we help the kids? We often forget about ourselves. So there's a Jamboard here that's going to be shared in the chat, and I want us to share. What are some ways that you practice wellness already? What are some things that you do that help support your own mental health and wellness? Yeah, anything that that could be helpful for the group. So I see the link here in the chat, if you could jump over to that at this point. Okay, I see one, mindfulness minutes. That's great. Mindfulness is huge. It can be a big help. Breathing exercise, absolutely. There's a lot of mindfulness in breathing exercises as well. Whole class yoga, I really like that. I'm actually gonna talk about that a little bit later in the presentation. Stretching, yoga, absolutely. Yeah, walks going to the gym, yoga, for sure. Body breaks, I like this. One-to-one chats with students, awesome. Hiking, yeah, I see a lot of physical activity. That's great. Just gonna move these. It looks like there's a few here. Awesome. Yeah, so a lot of great ideas here. Connecting with nature, meditation, absolutely. Getting guidance involved, I like that. Using your resources, for sure. Okay, so it looks like our ideas are starting to slow down, but I see a lot of great ideas. And one thing that I want to just bring up, 'cause I see yoga stretching a number of times, and this is something that I think we overlook how important stretching is. And obviously, there's a lot of stretching in yoga. One thing that a lot of people don't know is that if you're nervous about something, if you're anxious, you might feel physically tense, right? You feel your muscles get tense. That's certainly no surprise. However, what a lot of people don't know is that... Let's say I'm nervous for this presentation, and then the presentation happens

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and I walk away. I'm not nervous anymore, usually, right? But your muscles actually remember. So if you have a conflict with someone or if you're nervous about something, you have an uncomfortable meeting, oftentimes your muscles will remember. So that's why I just wanna point out how great stretching is for you and yoga and any sort of movement really, because doing these things can be really helpful of just loosening up the body and moving past those stressful situations. So I just wanna just comment on that briefly. I also like how someone put getting guidance involved. Being connected to your school community is also very important, and I think it's something that sometimes we overlook as the school day goes on, for sure. So those are some great strategies. And one of the reasons I wanted to do this is because sometimes, like I said, the day gets so busy, the school year gets so busy, we forget these positives that we already do and that we already know work, okay? Now, I've taught about wellness for some time now. And when I used to teach about wellness, I used to talk about, obviously, the diet, sleep, exercise, and mindset, or we can now even call that mental health. However, the more I researched about this and the more I learned about this, the more I realised that I wasn't quite right with this particular philosophy. Now, I wanna just preface this by saying this is not a way to heal a chronic illness or any replacement for any sort of medical recommendations. But what this is is very much a tool to help you reflect on your own wellness practices and take some time to look at this and say, "Okay, is my diet where it should be? Am I sleeping enough? Am I exercising enough? Am I being mindful? Am I stressed?" It's really just a tool to help you understand yourself a little better. So I just wanna preface this by saying that. Now, again, I realised through my research and through talking to folks and obviously being a psychotherapist, I'm not quite right when I show these evenly. What this should look like is something like this where, yes, your diet, exercise, and mental health are still those pillars of wellness, but you'll see down low here, we have a foundation that is sleep. Excuse me. And the reason why I put this in this order is because these activities are not exactly equal. So as an example, if I pack my lunch for work and I decide I'm not gonna have this healthy lunch, I'm gonna go to McDonald's instead. I'm gonna come back to school. I'm gonna teach. I'm gonna do what I need to do. I'm gonna wake up tomorrow feeling just fine. If I had planned on going to the gym after work, and I say, "You know what, I'm gonna skip it. I'm not really feeling it. I'm gonna wake up tomorrow and I'm probably gonna feel just fine." If I have a bit of a stressful day or a busy day at work, as long as it's not too, too stressful, I'm gonna go to bed at night and I'm hopefully gonna get a good night's sleep and I'm gonna wake up and I'll be feeling just fine. However, if you don't sleep, or if you don't sleep very well at all, you're gonna wake up tomorrow and you're really not gonna be yourself, okay? And that sleep or that even just recovery piece is so important, especially in our jobs where we're focused on helping others. We need to focus on recovering ourself, right? We have to, and we use this term all the time as educators, we have to be on, we have to be ready, we have to be focused, and we have to be positive and bring that positive energy to the classroom. Without that healthy amount of sleep and rest and downtime, we're gonna run into some problems. And even looking at it from more of a research-based approach. If we look at sleep and lack of sleep, there's some significant long-term issues that

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could arise. And I wanna show this video here. Oh. I wanna show this video here about what happens when you don't sleep, okay?

- My name is Matthew Walker. I am a professor of neuroscience and psychology at the University of California Berkeley, and I am the author of the book "Why We Sleep." We certainly know that a lack of sleep will actually prevent your brain from being able to initially make new memories. So it's almost as though, without sleep, the memory inbox of the brain shuts down and you can't commit new experiences to memory. So those new incoming informational emails are just bounced and you end up feeling as though you are amnesiac. You can't essentially make and create those new memories. We also know that a lack of sleep will lead to an increased development of a toxic protein in the brain that is called beta amyloid, and that is associated with Alzheimer's disease. Because it is during deep sleep at night when a sewage system within the brain actually kicks into high gear, and it starts to wash away this toxic protein, beta amyloid. So if you're not getting enough sleep each and every night, more of that Alzheimer's related protein will build up. The more protein that builds up, the greater your risk of going on to develop dementia in later life. What are the effects of sleep deprivation on the body? Well, there are many different effects. Firstly, we know that sleep deprivation effects the reproductive system. We know that men who are sleeping just five to six hours a night have a level of testosterone which is that of someone 10 years their senior. So a lack of sleep will age you by almost a decade in terms of that aspect of virility and wellness. We also know that a lack of sleep impacts your immune system. So after just one night of four to five hours of sleep, there is a 70% reduction in critical anticancer-fighting immune cells called natural killer cells, and that's the reason that we know that short sleep duration predicts your risk for developing numerous forms of cancer. And that list currently includes cancer of the bowel, cancer of the prostate, as well as cancer of the breast. In fact, the link between a lack of sleep and cancer is now so strong that, recently, the World Health Organization decided to classify any form of nighttime shift work as a probable carcinogen. So, in other words, jobs that may induce cancer because of a disruption of your sleep weight rhythms. We also know that a lack of sleep impacts your cardiovascular system because it is during deep sleep at night that you receive this most wonderful form of effectively blood pressure medication. Your heart rate drops. Your blood pressure goes down. If you are not getting sufficient sleep, you're not getting that reboot of the cardiovascular system, so your blood pressure rises. You have, if you're getting six hours of sleep or less, a 200% increased risk of having a fatal heart attack or a stroke in your lifetime. There is a global experiment that is performed on 1.6 billion people twice a year, and it's called daylight savings time. And we know that in the spring, when we lose one hour of sleep, we see a subsequent 24% increase in heart attacks the following day. Another question perhaps is, what is the recycle rate of a human being? How long can we actually last without sleep before we start to see declines in your brain function or even impairments within your body? And the answer seems to be about 16 hours of wakefulness. Once you get past 16 hours of being awake, that's when we start to see mental deterioration and physiological deterioration in the body. We know that after

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you've been awake for 19 or 20 hours, your mental capacity is so impaired that you would be as deficient as someone who is legally drunk behind the wheel of a car. So if you were to ask me what is the recycle rate of a human being, it does seem to be about 16 hours, and we need about eight hours of sleep to repair the damage of wakefulness. Wakefulness essentially is low-level brain damage.

- So of course, this is somewhat of a intense video, right? He throws a lot of information at us here, but it does... If we can take out a few pieces of that, it does show us the importance of keeping our body and our brain healthy through making sure we are getting adequate rest, adequate sleep, okay? Now, I wanna shift now to our students, right? And here is a Jamboard. And again, we will put the link here in the chat. I wanted to ask, what are we doing to set our students up for success in the classroom, specifically our students with learning disabilities? So what are we already doing that we know works? Structure and consistency, yeah, I like that. Having that routine, having those schedules. Being clear about expectations and schedules, absolutely. Yeah, clear expectations for sure. Yeah, I think making things clear for all of our students is very important, but I agree that, specifically, our students with special needs would very much benefit from this. Options for work, absolutely. Providing options is something that I think anyone who works with students with special needs knows the importance of. But one thing that I'm finding interesting now is at the secondary level, even in mainstream classes, teachers are encouraged to provide options on final assessments, even exams and whatnot. So that's very interesting. Psychologically safe environment, absolutely. Taking time to build that safe environment, for sure. Alternate seating options, yep. Making that environment as comfortable as possible. Daily walks, I like that. Flexible with due dates, yep. Flexibility is certainly huge. Incorporating choice, yep, as we mentioned, for sure. I'll give you another second here. Yeah, flexible, learn habits of students and triggers. Absolutely, getting to know our students, what's their baseline behavior, what are their triggers, how do they look when they might become dysregulated. Absolutely. Different activities, depending on student energy levels, absolutely. So you're taking into account the kind of wellbeing of the student, for sure. Connection and relationships, absolutely. Okay, so it looks like we're slowing down. Now, one thing I wanna talk about just briefly before we move on is... I'm happy someone put connection with students and relationships, and a couple people as well. Knowing your students, essentially, is so important. We know this. And you know, there's a child psychiatrist named Dr. Jean Clinton at McMaster, and she's talked a lot about how our direction, correction, and connection ratio has to be on. So yes, of course, we do some direction, we do some correction of our students, but we have to make sure that connection piece is also there just as prominently to build those relationships and also to maintain those relationships with students. If all we're doing is directing and correcting, we can't really build that relationship with the students and we can't really connect on that level to help them reach their full potential. Absolutely. So a lot of great ideas here. Did that one already, sorry. Okay. So, one thing that I'd like to talk about next is flow state. Now, for some people who perhaps did their undergrad in psychology or something like this, you

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may have heard of this already, but, essentially, what flow state is is that period of time where our arousal or interest and our control or ability on a selected activity meets at that correct level at the same time. A major indicator of flow state is when hours feel like minutes when you're engaged in that activity. So you're finding enough challenge in the activity while also enjoying that activity. And this is a really interesting thing because we all have those things, and I'd like you just to reflect at this point on those activities that make you lose track of time. It could be reading. It could be yoga. It could be dance, or basketball, or something, or music. We all have those things that we really enjoy. And when you look at the clock, it's like oh, wow, that was 30 minutes. And I became very interested in this topic because, for me, as a special education classroom teacher of students with behavioural and emotional needs, I had this one moment where a student, he was working on a project and he looked up said... The bell rang, and he looked up at me, and said, "Was that recess already?" And I said, "No, that's lunch." And he said, "Wow, this morning's going fast." And that to me was such a rewarding just interaction with that student. Now, are you gonna have that every single day? Perhaps not, if we're being realistic. However, knowing when your students are in that flow state, if you will, or when their ability to control the situation and their interest is at that correct level. I had another student, and this is a very interesting story for me. Again, my student's behavioural emotional needs, and I had one who was quite behavioural. And he was working on an activity in class, and I could tell he was really enjoying it. And we were transitioning to whatever it was, phys ed, or we were going to the library, or something. And I told all the kids to start putting their stuff away, and he didn't move, he kept working. So I gave him another warning, and the worker that was in the classroom with me was saying, "Ugh, he's being defiant again." And I said, "No, no, no, he doesn't hear us right now," because I could recognize in that moment he was so honed in on what he was doing because he was enjoying it and it was at that correct level for him. So, when we look at this chart, for example, this is where we want our students to be in learning. And I would argue, it's my contention that our students at the elementary level, and I'm generalising here, fall more over here. And our students at the secondary level sometimes fall more over here, specifically our students with special needs. Now, that's not to say our secondary students don't get anxious. That's not to say our elementary students don't get bored. However, if we're generalising this group. However, what we want is our students to be here. This is where they're doing the most growth, the most learning. And I think this is especially important for our learners with special needs because they have more barriers than our other students, right? Going to school is stressful. Going to school is perhaps more of a challenge in certain ways. So again, this is where your skills as an educator really need to come in. Control, this means that they're at that ability that they can control. So what are their reading levels? What are their math levels? What are their strengths? How can we take that information and build an activity around that, plus their arousal, in other words, their interest? So pairing their correct academic and ability levels with their interest is going to be something that helps us get here. And when we get here, essentially, that challenge and skill level meeting at that right point, okay? And again, the biggest thing is when students ask me, "Oh, it's already recess?" or "It's already this

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time?" Taking time to understand, again, their interests, but also doing those diagnostic assessments that will help you, A, understand their level, and B, put them in a right situation that will reduce that anxiety in the classroom and oftentimes reduce those negative behaviours. And I should also add to this before we move on, understanding how to implement those accommodations and modifications correctly as well. So leaning on your certs, leaning on other teachers who have had that student, and leaning on those things that have made that student successful in the past to try to help get us to that yellow zone. I don't particularly love that this chart's yellow. I think this should be green, but I didn't make the chart. So moving on here. I did talk a little bit about anxiety and fear and whatnot. Now, there's a psychologist named Paul Ekman who has done a lot of work on fear and understanding and recognizing different emotions through facial expressions, body language, et cetera. And this is a really cool little chart as well because, for me, it's important that we understand our baseline behaviour for our students with special needs. Okay? When it comes to learning disabilities, intellectual developmental disabilities, all this sort of stuff, those challenges are only exacerbated when students are at a heightened state emotionally. Now, I would argue that most students fall, when they are anxious, fall somewhere in here, that trepidation, nervousness, anxiety, dread. It's not often that we get students in terror or panic, et cetera. And it's also my contention that trepidation is not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes it gets you moving, it gets you working, right? However, when it gets here to that nervousness, anxiety, dread, that's when we see our learners with special needs become heightened. They have more behaviours. They might shut down. Ask yourself. I have XYZ student. What does this look like for them? Is this when they shut down? Is this when they flee the classroom? Is this when they get aggressive? What does that look like? Because oftentimes, if we can reduce the anxiety and get them out of this zone here, we can have more success in the classroom. And it's almost imperative that we create that calm learning environment to help them really bring that intensity level down of their emotions. And you folks came up with some great ideas, whether it's a physical activity break, some yoga, some deep breathing. All of these are great strategies, and we'll get to more strategies as we move on. But what would work best for your student with special needs? That's the question I want you to keep in your mind through this presentation. So, how do we promote mental health and wellness? So we've already talked about offering choice on how to show learning, how to show assessments. This is something that most school boards are really pushing at this point. Even at the secondary level, you're seeing people being encouraged, teachers being encouraged to offer it. Do you want to do an exam or do you wanna do a final project? Giving those students that choice, right? We also talked about structure and routine. I like to do this collaboratively. And certainly, it depends on your learner, whether that would work or not, but creating that structure, creating that routine. If this happens, here are our options. Building that with the student so that you incorporate their interest in that situation. Daily physical activity. Over COVID, all of these activities have been certainly reduced. And our students really need to get back into that shape of doing physical activity every day. Opportunities for body breaks. Now, I just pulled two options here that are free that you can find on YouTube. This one would be a

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little more suitable for potentially elementary kids. As you can see, lots of different physical activity options here. And then yoga, we had mentioned that in our Jamboard. Again, this is just one yoga option with lots of different options here. How can we incorporate this into our classroom? We're a journal. So this is something that is really interesting to me, both from a psychotherapy perspective, but also from an educational perspective. Because there was a study done that looked at the importance of just talking to one another. And unfortunately, for some people, they don't have people to share ideas with. They don't have have people at home to share their worries, their emotions with. And unfortunately, that's the case for some of our students, right? So giving them that option to do some journaling can be really helpful just to get those frustrations, those anxieties onto paper and out of the head. Both as a psychotherapist, I found it works for some of my clients. And as a teacher, I've noticed it's worked for some of my students. Excuse me. And finally, sensory activities. I know that most school boards are now really pushing sensory rooms. As previously mentioned, I teach at Trent, and one of the things that we talked about in the class two weeks ago with my teacher candidates was when you go into a cert room, all the different sensory activities, it feels so calming. One of my teacher candidates says it feels like home. When you go to a classroom, it's a completely different energy. So how can you bring some of those things from that cert room, some of those things that make a classroom feel like home into your particular classroom to support your students? So how do we reduce stress, anxiety, negative behaviours inside the classroom? So the first thing that I think is arguably the most important is teaching students to identify negative emotions. We know that the part of the brain called the amygdala, when you can actually say the emotion that you're experiencing, the amygdala will start to bring that emotion down. Now, I should preface this by saying... Excuse me. It doesn't make the emotion go away. If you're angry and you say that you're angry, you're still likely going to be angry. However, it gives that that part of your brain the opportunity to start pulling down on that emotion, which can be very helpful. So teaching our students to actually be able to identify those emotions, very important. Visual prompts that relate to emotion identification. Now, we've really moved away from zones of regulation. Right? But there has to be something else that's visual that we can use to support our students in actually identifying the emotion. Now, if we look at the zones of regulation for a student to say, "I'm yellow or I'm red," the colours, we've decided what those colours mean. However, the actual emotion is a lot more specific. And I'll show you a strategy to use from there moving forward, including relaxation strategies in the classroom. Whether that be yoga, whether that be deep breathing, whether that be allowing students to do some colouring if they feel a little stressed or teaching some mindfulness strategies, whatever you can do to fit into your classroom practice to support those students and specifically those learners who have some special needs can be of tremendous value in that long term. So I talked about those emotion regulation issues, right? Now, some students really like the zones, right? And we don't wanna completely take something away from a student if it's helping them, but what I would want to do is add something in. So specifically, we can do something like this where, yes, you have the zone of regulation, but here you also have the emotion listed or some emotions. I've just written

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down a few. So being able to help students, yeah, I'm in the red zone and I'm feeling angry, let's say. So that you're taking what they already know and adding something into it. As opposed to just throwing out the zones of regulation, we're doing something completely new. I recognize that that even can be quite stressful for students. So I've gone into classrooms and I've seen stuff like this printed and pasted on their desk or taped on their desk on the wall in a poster format. You really have to play around with it and figure out what works best for you because this can be so helpful, again, for bringing those negative emotions down and really helping your students regulate within that classroom context. Now I wanna show a mindfulness activity here. Now, this is done by Dr. Diane Gehart whose marriage and family therapist works with a lot of kids as well in California. I believe she's still in California. And she went into schools and did this program in California schools, essentially teaching mindfulness to students at various different ages. A and I wanna show this activity because I think it's something that can be quite helpful for students of various ages as long as you tweak it appropriately. So I wanna show this next.

- We're gonna do a breathing exercise and we're all gonna breathe together to start. Okay? So I want you to focus on this ball. And as it gets bigger, you're gonna inhale. And as it gets smaller, exhale. Breathe in and breathe out. Will you hold it out and do it for us while we breathe?

- [Student] Oh, I wanna do it.

- Ready? Thank you.

- Okay, so now what we're going to do is we're going to be doing a breathing mindfulness. I want you to sit back, get comfortable in your chairs. And if you'd like, you can close your eyes or close them part way to just have a soft gaze on the floor. And now I want you to put your hands on your belly like this, and I want you to just breathe in and feel your belly rise and breathe out. Okay. And do that again. And now you can just go to normal belly breathing and you can keep your hands on your belly if that helps you focus on your breath, and try to quiet your mind as much as you can. And when you notice your mind thinking about other things, whether they're voices you're hearing outside the room or your own thoughts in your head, just return your focus back to your breath. Okay. And go ahead and take a real big breath now and open your eyes. Okay. And we'll go on about our day.

- Okay, so again, perhaps this activity isn't quite for secondary students. However, it can be tweaked. And the belly breathing itself is something that I've used in a psychotherapeutic context as well. And there's both a psychological and a physiological effect to this. Psychologically, obviously we know that the importance of mindful breathing on mental health. But like I said earlier in this presentation, if you're stressed out about something, if you're anxious about something, your muscles will tighten up and your muscles actually loosen up later than your mind realises oftentimes. So by doing that belly breathing, what happens is it forces

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all of your lungs to work, okay? And often when we're stressed out, we only use the top part of our lungs. Even if you see a child who's having a temper tantrum, they breathe, right? They're using the top part of their lungs. We as adults even do that, but a lot of people don't know. It's just not as visual, right? So using your belly to breathe, that really stretches things out and can have some very positive effects just on your mental health, but also that physical relaxation as well that we know is so important. So, moving on now. I'd like to focus on the resources that are available to you. How do you implement all this stuff into the classroom context? And the one thing I always recommend is School Mental Health Ontario. Now, the one thing that I really like about School Mental Health Ontario is all of these resources are backed by research. They've been used in the classroom at least somewhat effectively, depending on the circumstance. And they also hire teachers to go on secondment for them to help create these resources. So you know that the resources are also coming from educators who have done these things. So there's both everyday classroom resources for elementary and secondary. Just for the sake of time, I'm going to focus on the elementary. And kind of moving with the theme of this, I'm gonna start with the identification of emotions. Now, you'll notice all of these different categories. So depending on what your classroom or what your student in particular is struggling with, you can pick and choose activities here, and they're all free, I should mention. Now, identification and management of emotions. This is something we've seen students struggle with because they haven't been around others. They haven't perhaps dealt with as much social frustration as they did when they were doing virtual learning, although that was a different type of frustration, I'm sure. And you'll notice here there's lots of different activities for each particular area. We're gonna look at recognizing for this one. And you know, as you could see, there's, again, lots of different activities to help you with various issues that you might be experiencing in your classroom. So one here is emoji emotions. So this can really help with those emotion recognition pieces in your classroom. So if you look here, it tells you actually how much time it should approximately take, the level that you can use this at. I've also noticed that if it says primary, junior, intermediate, you could probably do it with senior, grade 11, 12s as well. And it also gives you the material. So helping students recognize and discuss their feelings, we know this is so important, right? It gives you all of the instructions that you might need. It gives you a couple different adaptations. Now, for us, I think most folks here are pretty well versed with accommodations modifications. So you don't have to stick to exactly what they've recommended, but it is nice that they give you a couple options. They give you evidence of why this might be helpful for your students. And then, again, like I said, it's all backed up by research as well, okay? So using these, again, depending on what your focus is on, can be quite helpful for supporting student mental health. And yes, we're focusing this presentation on kids with learning disabilities and other special needs. However, when you do these things at a classroom level, you can see some greater benefit 'cause you obviously don't wanna centre out these students. So if you do things on a classroom level, often it does help those individuals who need it the most. Now, I wanna switch here to healthy relationships, specifically on conflict resolution, 'cause this is something that we're seeing a lot of, right? Our students have been doing virtual

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learning. They haven't been interacting with their friends quite as much. So, you're gonna see a lot of conflict in your classrooms, and I'm sure you already are. I like this one. I've used this one not too long ago, finding solutions. So again, it gives you the time that it might take, primary, junior, intermediate for this one, and the materials you'll need. So it really breaks these things down in a way that's easy for teachers to understand. And then, of course, having those adaptations is quite helpful. And again, backed by research, So we know that these activities do work for supporting mental health of our students. Now, in looking at a little more literacy-focused stuff, you'll notice another thing that School Mental Health Ontario does is they post these read-alouds of books that do have some sort of context around mental health. And we know the importance of reading to students. That's certainly not the focus of this presentation, but we know that reading to students is helpful for their literacy. But if we can bring in something in relation to mental health, it could be very helpful for them just to help them understand what they're going through perhaps and understand how to make connections and whatnot. So this is a book that I really appreciate and I've shown to my students. And again, like I said, School Mental Health Ontario, they bring in teachers who are in-practice educators to help them with this stuff. The person reading this story is an educator on secondment herself. And they have a number of different read-alouds that you can choose from. I've just chose one that I think really relates to a certain student of mine that I've used in the classroom. So I'd like to share this with you.

- Hello and welcome to the School Mental Health Ontario read-aloud. My name is Deb and I'm an educator on special assignment at School Mental Health Ontario. Today, I'll be reading "My Heart," written and illustrated by Corinna Luyken. Let's get started. "My Heart" by Corinna Luyken. My heart is a window, My heart is a slide. My heart can be closed or opened up wide. Some days it's a puddle. Some days it's a stain. Some days it is cloudy and heavy with rain. Some days it is tiny. But tiny can grow, and grow, and grow. There are days it's a fence between me and the world, days it's a whisper that can barely be heard. There are days it is broken, but broken can mend, and a heart that is closed can still open again. My heart is a shadow, a light, and a guide. Closed or open, I get to decide.

- So, as you can see, the vocabulary used in this particular book is not super complicated. Our elementary students can understand this. However, it's also something that you can bring into a secondary class when you look at the complexity and the meaning of this story. So, oftentimes when we think about how we can implement things to support mental health wellness of our students, we think of added work. But, really, this is something that you can even incorporate into your language plans, for example. So that yes, you're doing language, but you're also able to, excuse me, you're also able to have these discussions on mental health and create that space to support your students. And I think our students who have learning disabilities are certainly at a greater risk of having challenges in their mental health, especially given everything that's gone on in the last three or so years. So providing our students with an opportunity to see a book like

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this, and again, there's other books that they put out in terms of read-alouds, but I think it's so important to provide our students with something like this to support them and help them make connections and learn more about their mental health through this. So moving on, there's also resources that the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario puts forth. So, just in terms of myths and facts around learning disabilities and mental health. So stuff like this is great as kind of a next step just in your own learning about this particular topic. There's also a handbook on learning disabilities in mental health, which can also be a great further resource for folks who wanna further their education on this topic. And then, finally, supporting student wellbeing and mental health of students with learning disabilities because, yes, this webinar is somewhat of an overview on how to support students with learning disabilities and other students. But again, it is so important to continue your learning, and things like this can be very helpful in terms of taking those next steps and working with our students to improve both their mental health, their academic abilities, and their success in life, looking more long term, and I wanna kind of close this presentation with talking about, coming back to something that I had mentioned briefly, and that's that connection piece with our students. Because all of these things are great and can be helpful, but the biggest thing that you can do is connect with your students. I talked about Dr. Jean Clinton, the psychiatrist at McMaster University. She really emphasizes the correction, direction, connection piece. That ratio of those three things need to be appropriate because, really, if we're constantly directing and correcting our students, we're gonna see them burn out, and it's also gonna be hard on us. I talked about our own wellness being important too. So making sure that you're taking time to connect with your students on a one-to-one and small group level. Before I became a special ed teacher, I taught in French immersion for a while. And one thing that... it was hard to schedule in, I will admit, but one thing that made such a huge difference for me in my classroom management, the culture of the classroom, and I do also believe that just wellbeing of my students was I would schedule... It was sometimes as little, excuse me, one minute chats with my students. And in the those situations, I would just have them, "Tell me about your weekend." And initially, it was a tool that I use to assess their French oral language. So I got to talk to them one-on-one and that was great. I got a mark out of it, and it was good practice speaking in French for the students. And then I realised I was really building those connections with my students on a deeper level. Now, for me in a small class placement now, I have much more opportunity to do things like that. But trying your best to build those one-on-one activities to really build those connections and understand your students on a personal level, understand do they have siblings at the school, what's their family look like, and how you can better support them is really quite important when we look at all of these important mental health and wellbeing strategies as well. So here are a couple of my references. Susanna, I don't know if we wanna jump to questions at this point.

- [Susanna] Yeah, we can jump right into it. We've got some time to get through some questions that I have lined up. I don't know about the audience, but I was sufficiently frightened by the sleep part of your presentation. I'm already planning to go to bed an hour earlier than usual. Just

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gotta keep that brain fresh. Well, thank you for that wonderful presentation, and I love that you left us off on the importance of making that connection with your students. And I think a lot of us think about the connection in a really beautiful, and it is, and we're picturing smiles and high fives, and good mornings, and all that stuff. But when you do make a connection with a student on a deeper level, you're also opening yourself up to them coming to you with some real issues in their life. So what would you say are the first steps for maybe a new teacher or maybe someone who just hasn't had a lot of interaction with this? But when they notice that a student is having an issue with their mental health or a student does come to them with questions, what are the first sort of steps to take?

- Yeah, absolutely. That's certainly a great question, and I think that the first step to take is recognize that you're not necessarily a mental health practitioner. Sometimes we put a little too much pressure on ourselves to fix all of the issues happening in the classroom and we don't recognize that. I would say all school boards, but I don't know all school boards, so I'll say the vast majority of school boards have psychological service teams and social work teams there to support you. So the first thing I would do is kind of recognize that. What resources are available to me? And typically, that first step is talk to the cert. You can even discuss this with admin or previous teachers to understand what the baseline level of this student is. Because if you're a new teacher, you might not understand what the baseline behaviour is or whatnot. So take some time to connect with the in-school team. However, if you do feel like it's really a significant mental health issue, connect with admin and they will typically have psych services or social work services, depending on the circumstance, connect with that student, so that you can have that support from a mental health professional as well. But again, I find that a lot of, especially new teachers that I work with, they get quite overwhelmed with that, and I think it is because they feel like they're alone. Right? The student really depends on me and their mental health depends on me. But understanding that there is a team built around you and you're not necessarily expected to know everything and you're certainly not expected to know everything in terms of mental health as well. So yeah, the team approach is what I would recommend, and I think it's what's very effective.

- [Susanna] Wonderful, thank you so much. So, next question. I did take a peek in the Q and A, and right now there's just one very sweet thank you so much for your presentation. So if anyone does have questions, feel free to pop them in there, but don't worry, I still have more. So I guess my next question is, we've gone through the scenario of one student in the classroom having a mental health need. What happens if you have multiple students who have these needs? How do you balance those needs in one classroom trying to get the learning done and there are also these big emotions going on?

- Yeah, yeah, and I think in terms of class-wide strategies, I think that's where School Mental Health Ontario, those resources can be very helpful 'cause the vast majority of those resources,

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even the two that I pulled up, are very much whole class activities that could also be broken down into sections as well. So taking that time to assess, A, what the need is, is it more on the behavioural level? Is it those students who have shutdowns and it's something that I can't see? And then trying to align that with something on the School Mental Health Ontario website and pulling those resources. And again, looking at the relationship piece as well, whether it's doing something as simple as moving the seating plan around or... I've seen teachers quite effectively use kind of a buddy system at the elementary level more so. So having those things that help students build connection along with those whole group mental health activities, calming activities. And the third thing I would add is that structure and routine. Students have to know what's coming next, and having that be visible to students, whether that's on the board, or on your smart board, or your projector, whatever you use, it really does help lower that anxiety just in a general sense.

- [Susanna] Wonderful. I like that you brought it back to anxiety now 'cause that's kind of going on to my next question, which I think we have time for just one more. So just to go back to your topics of the flow state and how a little bit of fear can be a good thing. It sounds like you kinda need buy-in from the students of like, "This is gonna be hard, but you're gonna enjoy it." How do you get over that hurdle of maybe managing the frustrations when they do hit that, "Ooh, this is hard" kind of moment, and getting them to just get up the nerve to try a new thing?

- Yeah, what a great question. And I think perhaps one thing that could have also been added to this presentation is something to that effect around that growth mindset. I know that most teachers are really in that place of teaching growth mindset, but now it's actually in our curriculum, in the math curriculum around social emotional learning. So making sure you're taking time to explicitly teach how to overcome problems. Having perhaps struggles with math or language or whatever the case may be, it's not necessarily a bad thing, but how we learn to overcome that stuff is what's most important. So I've been in classrooms that have kind of motivational quotes on the walls and growth mindset bullet points and stuff like that. So really catering that information to what you're trying to teach. And oftentimes growth mindset is this great big idea, but we need to... Sometimes less is more, and focus on a couple pieces of growth mindset as opposed to teaching everything, if that makes sense.

- [Susanna] Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for answering our questions and putting together this wonderful presentation. Also, we've got a few more thank you for your time and sharing this afternoon. So it seems like the audience is really into it as well. So, just before we leave today, that's all the time we have for our presentation and questions, and we're gonna have to end the webinar. But if you do have further questions, we try to always be there for you guys. You can email us at info@ldatschool.ca or find us on Twitter using our hashtag, #LDwebinar, and we will endeavour to answer as many questions as we get. So always reach out to us if you've got a question. So on behalf of the LD@school team, I would once again like to

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thank Justin. Thank you, Justin, for this presentation and thank all of our participants for joining us today. Please remember we will be sending out the presentation slides and a short survey probably first thing tomorrow morning. And the survey that is included in there, the feedback we received through this survey provides us with a lot of really important information. So I'm just gonna push you one last time to please fill that out. And once the webinar recording is available and has been transcribed and closed captioned, we will also be sending you an email to let you know about that. All right, and that is all for us today. Thank you again for participating and enjoy your evenings.

- Thank you.