Classroom STRATEGIES
for *Supporting Students* with *Mental Health Concerns*
(Adapted from: "Supporting Minds: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Students' Mental Health and Well-being" – Draft Version 2013 – Ontario Ministry of Education)

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CONCERN	DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES and/or ACCOMMODATIONS
ANXIETY	
	Provide predictable schedules and routines in the classroom. Provide advance warning of changes in routine. Encourage students to take small steps towards accomplishing a feared task.
Range of anxiety-related behaviour.	Check in with the student at the beginning of each day. Check with the student that assignments have been written down correctly. Reward brave, non-anxious behaviour. Notice when the student is being brave in attempting something he/she finds challenging. Reduce schoolwork and/or homework based on information from parents and the school team about how much stress the student can handle. Maintain the student's regular schedule as much as possible. Encourage and reward all positive steps in managing anxiety.
Perfectionism	Communicate the message that mistakes are normal, or reframe mistakes as learning opportunities. Reassure the student that "everyone makes mistakes sometimes" or "nobody's perfect". Encourage the student to produce rough drafts and use brainstorming. Avoid drawing unnecessary attention to mistakes (e.g., avoid posting test scores or publicly commenting on mistakes). Recognize and reward small improvements (e.g., finishing a task on time without continual revising to make it perfect).
Fear of large assignments	Help the student break the project or large assignment into manageable chunks. Help the student make a schedule to do each chunk. Have the student hand in one chunk at a time (rather than trying to meet one final deadline), and provide positive reinforcement for each submission. Reduce the size of the chunks if the student continues to have difficulty. Build the student's confidence by rewarding partial success or evidence of effort (instead of praising only complete pieces of work). Help the student focus on his or her strengths and ability to improve performance with effort.
Test anxiety	Different arrangements for taking tests (e.g., provision of a separate, quiet room for a student who is upset by distractions).

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	Clearly indicate (when appropriate) how much a test or exam will count towards the final grade (all students). Allow extra time to complete tests for students who are upset by time pressure. Avoid giving surprise quizzes or tests.
	Encourage the student to take a few slow, deep breaths before starting. Encourage the student to identify an easy question to start with.
Anxiety about time pressure	Avoid "minute math" or other tests with time pressure. Provide incentives to encourage the student to work at an appropriate pace (e.g. "When you finish working on x, you can go back and work on the computer."). Flexible time limits will help decrease anxiety. Encourage the student to finish one task at a time before starting another (i.e., discourage multitasking).
Intolerance of uncertainty	Provide information to increase the student's ability to predict events and outcomes wherever possible. Provide clear daily schedule and clear deadlines. Warn the student if something out of the ordinary is planned and help him or her to prepare for it. Provide checklists and other visual reminders for tasks and upcoming events. Develop a coping plan for unexpected events. (eg. If there is a fire drill; if there is a substitute teacher) that the student can keep at his/her desk. The plan may include a pause for slow, deep breathing, sitting next to a chosen buddy (who knows the plan), and referring to a summary of the student's needs and daily routines. (Such a plan could be used to help a substitute teacher ensure that the student's routines are maintained in the absence of the regular teacher.)
Excessive reassurance seeking	Try to respond calmly (this may help to decrease anxiety). Answer questions with a simple explanation and repeat once, using the same words (to minimize chances of confusion). Encourage the student to save further questions for a specific time, and then be available at that time. Positively reinforce any progress towards increased independence. Provide realistic but reassuring information about specific worries or fears. Encourage the student to write down his/her worries before seeking help from an adult.

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Physical Symptoms *(e.g., Frequent headaches, stomach-aches, washroom breaks, episodes of hyperventilating under stress)*	Encourage slow, deep breathing when the student appears stressed. Have a quiet place where the student can go for a few minutes if he/she is a feeling overwhelmed. Agree on a signal the student can use when he/she needs to go to the washroom. Encourage the student to try to extend the time between washroom visits and to return to class within a few minutes.
Interpersonal sensitivity *(e.g., The student is overly worried about/sensitive to possible negative feedback from others)*	Maintain a calm, patient tone of voice when talking to the student. Avoid penalizing the whole class when a few students misbehave. Set firm limits for misbehavior and remain calm when enforcing them. Set reasonable academic expectations that take anxiety into account but are not too low and do not single out the student who is anxious. Quickly address any teasing or bullying among students. Positively reinforce efforts to seek help by students who are usually afraid to ask for help (perhaps for fear of being criticized or looking stupid).
Social anxiety *(e.g., The student fears/avoids social situations/ situations where he/she will be evaluated; and /or situations that involve performing in small or large groups, participating in class, or giving oral presentations).*	Talk openly about the fact that everyone feels nervous about speaking in front of a class. Work to develop an atmosphere of acceptance throughout the classroom. Resist pressure to allow the student to avoid social interactions. Encourage autonomy, to allow the student to develop effective coping and problem-solving skills. For a student who fears answering questions in class, first try providing the student with the answer to the question before class. Gradually work up to rehearsing questions and answers with the student before class, to prepare the student to answer out loud in class. If a student is extremely worried about responding to questions in class, have the student answer yes/no questions first (instead of open-ended ones). Create an environment in which students feel welcome to speak up and socialize. Provide opportunities for students to work, socialize, and speak in small groups, first with one other person, then with two, three, or four people. Identify activities the student can do that will help increase his/her level of comfort (e.g., returning forms to the school office, helping with the school newspaper, working in the library). Pair the student with another student who is open and welcoming.

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		Encourage the student to participate in extra-curricular activities.
Separation anxiety		Develop a plan for the student's arrival at school (e.g. provide an immediate reward for attending) with appropriate staff (with parental permission). Provide consistent and predictable arrival routines. Arrange for a buddy to greet the child in the playground and help with the transition into the classroom. Provide positive reinforcement for brave behaviour and refrain from commenting on anxious behaviour.
Specific fears		Recognize any progress, however small, that the student makes towards confronting the fear. Try not to allow the student to avoid an activity because of the fear. Observe the student's behaviour to make sure that the student is not avoiding participating in everyday activities.

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DEPRESSION	
Strategies that can help all students develop and maintain a positive outlook	Support class-wide use of coping strategies and problem-solving skills.
	Provide all students with the information about normal growth and development and ways to cope with stress (e.g., ways to address peer pressure, build friendships, address depressive feelings, maintain good sleep hygiene, build exercise into each day).
	Write instructions on the board to provide a visual cue for students who are having trouble focusing on spoken information.
	Model and teach optimistic and positive attitudes, language, and actions.
	Work with student's strengths and build on them when they complete activities in class.
	Provide students with responsibilities and tasks that they may enjoy.
	Provide a space in the classroom for students to go when they are feeling overwhelmed.
	Help the students to chunk assignments and prepare for tests well in advance of deadlines.
For Physical Symptoms	Seat the student near the front of the classroom where the teacher can readily provide assistance or the student can easily leave as part of a coping strategy.
	Allow frequent breaks to help student with concentration problems. Modifications can include: - adjusting the student's workload; - scheduling study periods for times when the student is most likely to be alert; - determining a schedule that encourages attendance; - using multiple-choice questions instead of open-ended questions or oral questions; - providing extra time for the student to complete tests.
	Work with the student to develop clear expectations that he/she feels are reasonable.
	Help the student to set realistic goals and to monitor his/her progress.
	Provide the student with guidance on how to organize and plan the day (e.g., use of a checklist or agenda).
	Establish a format and routine for regular communication between the school, parents, and any mental health professionals who may be involved, using a daily agenda, or e-mail "check-in".
	Assign one task at a time.
	Help the student break a project or large assignment into small, manageable chunks and make a schedule for completing each

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	chunk. Have the student hand in one chunk at a time. Provide positive reinforcement when each unit is completed. Make sure the student has all relevant class notes and study information prior to a test. Ask open-ended questions for which there is no specific, correct answer, to enable the student to contribute to discussions without fear of "being wrong" in front of others. Find ways to increase the student's self-esteem. Strategically introduce opportunities for the student to participate in structured positive social interactions with peers (e.g., group assignments, small-group work). Check in with the student each day (e.g. greet the student at the door and ask a question about something of interest to the student). Correct errors or suggest improvements in the context of offering praise and support, as the student may be unusually sensitive to criticism. Provide the student with opportunities to participate in making decisions about class activities and assignments, to help increase his/her motivation, interest, and feelings of success.
BIPOLAR DISORDER	
	Establish a method for regular communication between the school and parents about the expectations for the student and/or homework tasks. Provide clear, simple instructions to the student, in small chunks, since complex instructions may intimidate or confuse the student. Check in with the student on arrival to determine how the student is feeling and, where possible, provide alternatives to stressful activities on difficult days. Adjust the homework load to prevent the student from becoming overwhelmed. Adjust expectations until symptoms improve. Helping a student choose and focus on attainable goals when symptoms are more severe will improve the student's chances of success. Set up a procedure to allow the student to exit quickly and safely from an overwhelming situation. Allow extra time for the transition to a new activity or location. Refusal by a student with bipolar disorder to follow directions or move on to the next task may be caused by anxiety and may not be intended as defiance. If a student is thinking that everything is going wrong, help him or

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	her to focus on things that are going right (e.g., have the student write about something that has gone wrong and on the opposite page write about things that have gone right).
ATTENTION & HYPERACTIVITY/ IMPULSIVITY	
To promote a calm classroom atmosphere to help all students pay attention	Provide a structured environment and a consistent daily routine. Provide advance warning of changes in routines or activities. Establish a routine and set of rules for moving from one activity to the next. Provide easy-to-follow directions and instructions (e.g., explain one step at a time; chunk multi-step directions). Post rules where everyone can see them. Reinforce positive behaviour such as raising a hand before speaking, engaging in quiet work. Provide opportunities to learn by doing to give students an outlet for excess energy. Limit visual and auditory distractions in the classroom as much as possible while considering the needs of all students. When talking to students, address them directly and use eye contact. Wait until a student is paying attention before continuing a conversation. Avoid a focus on competition, as students' urge to win or be the first can increase the likelihood of impulsive behaviour.
To improve executive functioning *(e.g., ability to plan, problem solve, do more than one thing at a time)*	Reduce the amount of information student have to retain and process. Provide direct instruction in specific academic skills. Chunk critical instructions, allow time for mental processing, and repeat. Use advance organizers, structured note-taking sheets, manipulatives, and visual representations. Use teaching/learning strategies such as mnemonics. Use class-wide peer tutoring.
To improve students' ability to pay attention	Determine students' strengths and needs and adjust instructional practice accordingly Find ways to support active engagement in learning through understanding student's interests. Provide activities that capitalize on student's strengths and abilities. Monitor student learning to detect gaps in skills and knowledge, as students with poor attention may not take in as much information as their peers.

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	Create a structured and predictable classroom environment. Break down tasks into smaller chunks or units; gradually introduce tasks that take longer. Assign only one task at a time. Give smaller assignments. Help students to record each day's homework and what they need to do in a planner or journal. Check to ensure they have recorded the information accurately. Teach the student to use checklists and check items off as they are completed. Ask the student to repeat instructions (e.g., "OK, so, tell me what you must do"). Provide encouragement such as stars or small, frequently changing rewards for younger students. Write assignments and homework on the board and repeat them aloud to the class. Seat students with attention problems close to the teacher and away from distractions such as windows, doors, or other students with attention problems. Use an attention cue to prompt students to remain on task. Provide extra time for completing tests. Allow test taking in a quiet room (if feasible). For adolescents: Chunk units of learning in 10-to 15-minute blocks, followed by rapid review to consolidate learning. Use daily communication books to inform parents about positive things that occur in the student's day and challenges the student faces.
To reduce/manage behaviour associated with hyperactivity/ impulsivity	Create a structured and predictable classroom environment. Establish short work sessions. Break down tasks into several smaller chunks or units. Assign only one task at a time. Suggest the use of fidget toys for students who are fidgeting or squirming. For young children: Ensure that consequences for undesirable behaviour follow immediately after inappropriate behaviour so the child understands the connection. Clearly outline the consequences for undesirable behaviour ahead of time and apply them consistently. Create a monitoring system, such as counting the number of times in an out of seat. Provide activities that appeal to multiple senses. Establish clear rules for behaviour and conduct.

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	Seat students close to the teacher and away from distractions such as windows, doors, or other students with attention problems. For young children: Have the student do simple errands that allow him/her to get up, move around with a purpose, and feel helpful.
The student makes careless errors or does not pay attention to important details.	Provide the student with finished examples of assignments to let him/her know exactly what the finished product should look like. Provide the student with a concrete visual reminder of key steps, such as a sequence chart listing important actions.
The student cannot focus attention on a task long enough to progress with it.	Strengthen the student's engagement by providing increased opportunities to respond (e.g., through peer tutoring and/or the use of response cards). Encourage active learning through discussions, group activities, and activities that draw on the special talents or skills of the student.
The student procrastinates about starting a task.	Discuss the student's plan for the work to make sure he or she knows what the steps are. Prompt the student to get started. Walk the student through the first portion of the task to get him or her started. Write down the time when the student starts and the time the student will stop work. Teach the student to estimate how much time the task will take and then monitor how long it actually takes.
Student has difficulty following through on instructions.	Use small-group instruction or peer-assisted learning strategies to provide the student with guided, proactive instructions. Simplify instructions and outline steps one at a time. Provide concrete examples and scoring rubrics so the student will know what a good completed assignment looks like. Teach the student how to use a calendar and an assignment planner. Provide visual reminders of instructions, coach the student with guided practice and provide visual cues for the steps needed to complete assignments.
Student appears to be forgetful or loses things.	Provide visual reminders of key actions or materials.
Student is distracted by extraneous details.	Provide a visual checklist to guide academic work. Increase opportunities for the student to respond and get feedback through response cards, small-group work, peer-assisted learning strategies, and computer-assisted learning activities.
BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS	
To promote positive	Provide predictable schedules and routines in the classroom.

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behaviour among all students.	Focus the students' attention before starting the lesson.
	Use direct instruction to clarify what will be happening.
	Model the quiet, respectful behaviour students are expected to demonstrate.
	Create an inviting classroom environment that may include a quiet space, with few distractions, to which a student can retreat.
	Communicate expectations clearly and enforce them consistently.
	Use clear statements when speaking to students: "I expect you to…" or "I want you to…".
	At the beginning of the school year, clearly and simply define expectations for honesty, responsibility, and accountability at school. Repeat these expectations often to the entire class, especially when violations occur.
	Don't focus too much attention on children who blame others, since that might inadvertently reinforce the behaviour.
	Focus on appropriate behaviour. Use rules that describe the behaviour you want, not the behaviour you are discouraging (e.g., Instead of saying "No fighting", say "Settle conflicts appropriately").
	Begin each day with a clean state.
	Facilitate the transition from the playground to the classroom by calmly telling students when there are five minutes left and then one minute left in recess, encouraging them to prepare to come in, and helping them settle in class when recess is over. Schedule a predictable classroom activity that most students will enjoy to follow recess, to help provide a smooth transition.
Behaviour problems (verbally/physically)	Use non-verbal cuing, such as hand gestures, proximity, facial expressions, or other signals to let a student know in a low-key way (without drawing the attention of the whole class) that the behaviour is not acceptable.
	Use low-profile interventions for minor problems so that students are not rewarded for misbehavior by becoming the centre of attention.
	Use a neutral, non-confrontational tone (e.g., "I notice that you have been …") when talking about behaviour with the student.
	For the aggressive student: Encourage him/her to participate in sports activities.
	For young children: Help them to express their anger or frustration verbally. This may require the educator to write out the words for the student.
	Arrange a quiet, safe place where the student can go to calm down when angry or frustrated.

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		Help the student to practice using "self-talk", to talk him/herself through times when things are going wrong. For example, "I have the right to be mad, but I am not going to lose it".
		Give positive reinforcement to the student for showing self-control in situations that would normally make him/her angry, annoyed, or upset (eg., give a tangible reward such as a classroom privilege or free time).
		Structure classroom seating arrangements in the classroom to find the optimal location for the student.
		Teach alternative ways of dealing with anger or frustration (e.g., walking away, talking).
		Provide a quiet space away from peers where the student can work independently (but do not isolate the student as a form of punishment).
		Maintain consistent expectations and daily routines.
		Plan a full schedule of activities to avoid periods of unstructured time.
		Provide clear instructions and make sure the rules are understood before an activity begins.
		Establish clear classroom rules, review them often, and post visual reminders of what they are.
		Provide enough time for the student to complete work or activities.
		Clearly communicate what the time limits are for tasks and activities and check to ensure that the student understands what they are. Keep the student informed about how much time is left (e.g., use a signal such as turning off lights).
		Develop strategies to support the student during the transition between activities.
		Reinforce the student's efforts to clear away his/her materials after a task is finished (workbook, pencil).
		Give the students brief assignments to start with and longer ones as the student's ability to cope with the work improves.
		Allow the student to begin a new activity when he/she demonstrates self-control.