



The impact of a mental health curriculum in Francophone schools

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Health Canada

Lack of services and resources

- Mental health
- Rural region
- Francophone children and adolescents

Did you know...

Second leading cause of infirmity by 2020
(WHO)

1 in 5 have mental health problems

Large % experience onset in childhood

20% of children have emotional problems

Did you know... (Cont.)

10% have serious problems at school, at home, with friends

Depression 3-10 times more likely to occur in adolescence

Large % (> 75%) do not receive adequate treatment

80% respond well to treatment

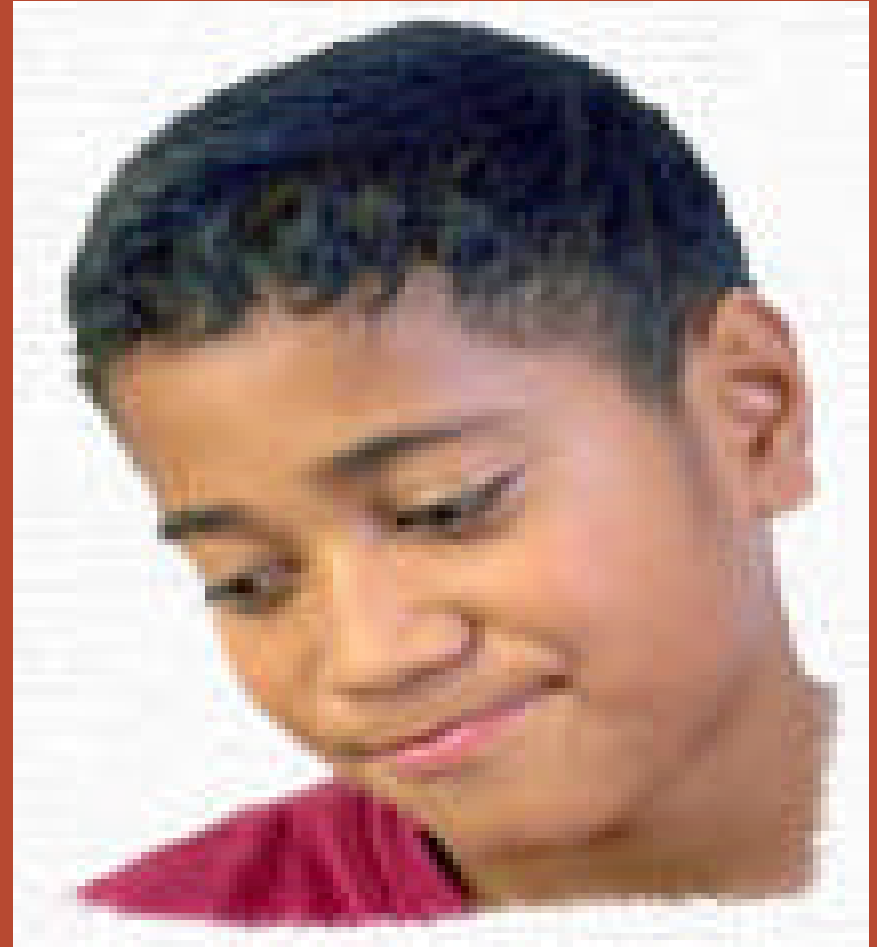
Did you know... (Cont.)

- Suicide rates in Canada
 - Third highest rate
 - Ages 15 to 19
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadian teenagers, after accidents

UNICEF

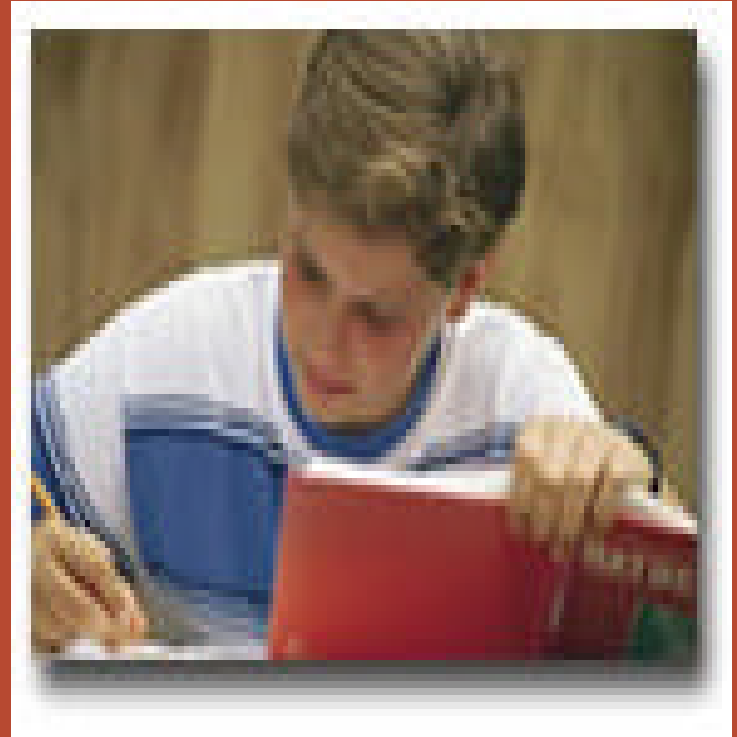
Stigma

- 63% cite shame, fear, peer pressure as major barriers to seeking help
- Moreover,... 38% of parents would be ashamed to admit that their child has a mental health disorder



Mental health

- Directly affects the ability of children to learn and benefit from education
- Unresolved disorders can lead to:
 - Learning problems
 - Decreased academic performance
 - Truancy
 - Dropping out
 - Special education referral



Long-term consequences

- Alcohol abuse
- Trouble with the law
- Infirmity into adulthood
- Potential for reduced economic status



What is needed?

- Mental health is one aspect of a person's overall health
- Increase knowledge, change attitudes toward mental health

If we teach our children early on to be comfortable with the concept of mental health, they will be more likely to seek help if they believe that they have a problem (dispelling stigma).

Curriculum

Implementation phase

September to January 2002

Educational materials

- Express their feelings
- Recognize normal feelings
 - “Highs” and the “lows” are normal; sadness, fear, can be expected
- Recognize warning signs (know when to be concerned)
 - Signs and symptoms
 - Duration of symptoms
 - Creating problems at school, at home or with friends

Educational materials

- Depression, anxiety disorders, attention deficit disorder with/without hyperactivity (behaviours that can interfere with learning)
- Increase the likelihood of the child in asking for help
 - parents, teachers, an aunt, uncle, grandparents
- Available resources

Warning signs

- Signs do not confirm or exclude a disorder
- It is not our job to identify or diagnose a disorder
- Warning signs \neq Depression (T \neq meningitis)

Messages to teachers

- The goal is to encourage the student to confide in someone
- The teacher
 - Listens and refers the student to the appropriate resource
 - Does not act as a counsellor

Pilot project results

Baseline data

Little knowledge and some negative attitudes regarding mental illnesses

Response rate increased substantially

Postcurriculum data suggest

Improved attitudes towards mental health

Statistically significant improvement in mental health knowledge

Better knowledge of effective help-seeking strategies

Children's attitudes

- *Would you befriend someone with....?*

Assessment time	Baseline (n = 92)			January (n = 84)		
Mental disorder	<u>Depression</u>	<u>Anxiety</u>	<u>ADD</u>	<u>Depression</u>	<u>Anxiety</u>	<u>ADD</u>
% response rate	59	33	30	96	86	94
% responding "Yes"	70	37	43	79	83	87
% responding "No"	26	57	50	20	15	11
% ambiguous responses	4	7	7	1	1	1

Children's knowledge

- *Distribution: knowledge of disorders: What do you think ___ is?*

Assessment time	Baseline (n = 92)			January (n = 84)		
Mental disorder	<u>Depression</u>	<u>Anxiety</u>	<u>ADD</u>	<u>Depression</u>	<u>Anxiety</u>	<u>ADD</u>
% Complete	0	0	0	0	0	4
% Partial	4	3	0	10	54	20
% Little	38	1	8	44	5	39
% None	58	96	92	46	42	37

Distribution: ability to recommend appropriate actions

• If a child has ____, what do you think he or she should do?

Assessment time	Baseline (n = 92)			January (n = 84)		
Mental disorder	<u>Depression</u>	<u>Anxiety</u>	<u>ADD</u>	<u>Depression</u>	<u>Anxiety</u>	<u>ADD</u>
% 2 effective strategies	3	0	0	10	8	8
% 1 effective strategy	16	2	4	38	36	35
% incomplete idea(s)	13	2	1	30	26	24
% inappropriate / no idea	67	96	95	23	30	33

Level of comfort discussing mental health and asking for help for mental health disorders

- *All children in grades 1 to 3*
- *Students in grades 4 to 7 spoke openly about mental health but not about their feelings*

Long-term goal of the project

- The education department adopted this program for the curriculum for Anglophone and Francophone schools in Nova Scotia
- Make the materials accessible in Canadian schools