

GRADE 7

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The Mental and Emotional Well-Being Unit of the Health program aims to enable students to function effectively in a social context. An increase in self-understanding will lead to an enhancement of their self-concept. Together with the acquisition of decision-making, communication and coping skills, this will lead to an improvement in students' mental and emotional well-being, and in their ability to function effectively socially.

The school can contribute greatly in the development of a healthy mental and emotional well-being, through the attitudes of staff, and the atmosphere in both the classroom and the school. Positive attitudes and a positive atmosphere will enhance students' self-concept.

For that reason, the creation of a positive classroom atmosphere is essential for teaching this unit (Refer to "Introduction Building A Positive Classroom Atmosphere"). Since the unit deals with very personal topics (students are, after all, learning about themselves, and nothing can be more personal than that), teachers should be aware of the need for sensitivity and respect. Students should be given the opportunity to participate in discussions, but should also be given the opportunity to pass, if they feel uncomfortable in sharing information with others. Students, and teachers, will gradually become more accustomed to the teaching methods used in this unit, and will soon begin to feel quite comfortable with the unit. Pilot testing of this unit indicated that students were hesitant for the first two or three lessons, but then really enjoyed learning about themselves.

Because of the personal nature of the unit, teachers must become familiar with its cultural appropriateness. Different cultural groups have different values regarding the self, as opposed to the group. They have different ways of appropriately expressing (or not expressing) feelings. Teachers should adapt the materials as necessary to fit the local situation. Wherever possible, members of the local culture should teach culturally sensitive topics to enhance and reinforce students' understanding of these topics within the appropriate cultural context.

Mental and emotional well-being refers to how a person feels, thinks and acts. If she/he feels "good", this translates into positive feelings, positive relationships with other people, decisiveness and an ability to cope with the stresses of every day life. A person who does not feel "good" has difficulty forming worthwhile relationships and has difficulty functioning in every day life.

SELF-CONCEPT

Self-concept is the sum of ideas (or perception) including beliefs and attitudes, that a person has about him/herself. It includes self-worth, self-image and self-esteem.

Self-concept is derived from three elements:

- the real person, i.e., what the individual is really like
- others' perceptions of the individual. Self-concept is developed through interaction. If the interaction is positive (i.e., loving, supportive, etc), self-concept will be positive. Self-concept is defined by key people in a person's environment (e.g., family members, friends, peers, elders, etc.), and
- the individual's perceptions of him/herself. An individual lives up to his/her own expectations and depends on him/herself rather than on others.

When young people move toward a more individual and independent sense of identity during adolescence, developing moral values, physical changes, sexual impulses, changing relationships etc., all impact on a person's self-concept.

Students can take responsibility for the enhancement of their own positive self-concept (throughout life) by developing skills which include:

- occasional self-praise, the student must admit to him/herself that it is his/her ability and effort that has given each success, not luck and an easy task.
- acknowledgement of personal successes and the contributing strengths, success in itself is not adequate.
- recognition and identification of personal strengths, they can start to do this by identifying strengths required to perform specific tasks.
- self-examination skills which identify things that can be changed, the individual must be willing to work on those while accepting things that cannot be changed. This can be achieved through:
 - setting realistic goals
 - setting goals one at a time
 - identifying small steps to achieve the goal
 - rewarding oneself
- developing the ability to accept praise rather than denying the strength being praised, this helps establish self-worth. People can learn specific skills, such as how to accept a compliment.
- learning how to benefit by mistakes and accepting them, rather than being defeated or deflated by them, games of trial and error and a discussion of the process can develop this skill.

| Characteristics of high self-esteem | Characteristics of low self-esteem |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - positive evaluation of self - feeling of self-worth - self-confident - moderate risk takers - clear about strengths and weaknesses - able to accept constructive criticism - good interpersonal skills - able to avoid destructive behaviour - an ability to self-actualize (become all they can in life) - ability to acknowledge their success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unhappy with themselves - anxious - a need to compare and evaluate themselves in relation to others - unwilling to risk failure and resulting disapproval - avoidance in facing personal short-comings - sensitive to criticism - unable to form good relationships, unpopular - submissive, nonassertive, dependent - a high need for approval - an overriding desire to live up to the expectations of others - never sees their own success as such |

A positive self-concept results in high self-esteem, a negative self-concept in lack of self-esteem. Individuals exhibit attributes that correspond with their level of self-esteem.

Anxiety can hinder people with low self-esteem from entering social situations. Taking this risk is necessary to make new friends, develop new skills and provide opportunities for positive acknowledgement of the individual. However, risk taking may result in failure, which the low-esteem individual has difficulty accepting.

Everyone can contribute to an environment that helps the development of a positive self-concept through:

- having a positive attitude
- using encouragement rather than praise
- expressing their feelings, encouraging and teaching others to do so - practising good listening skills (non-judgemental)
- encouraging differences and creativity
- allowing responsibility
- being a good role model
- making the individual feel special
- not ridiculing or embarrassing others
- giving individuals a chance to do the things they do well (and helping them), this allows them to experience success
- examining the consequences of behaviour
- clearly defining performance standards