



# Supporting Transition Resilience of Newcomer Groups (STRONG)

## Supporting STRONG Implementation in Schools: Information for SCHOOL TEACHERS

### What is STRONG?

STRONG is a school-based group intervention that was developed to promote resilience and reduce psychological distress among newcomer students. The program aims to promote individual strengths, build skills to make positive choices, and provide a sense of self and belonging. STRONG is a manualized intervention and has two versions: elementary and secondary. Licensed mental health clinicians in schools (i.e., social workers or psychologists) receive training to implement STRONG with newcomer students.

### Program Structure

- Ten weekly group sessions
- One additional individual session with each participant to help them process their journey narrative
- Students are encouraged to practice the STRONG skills outside of sessions
- Clinicians are encouraged to facilitate a parent meeting as part of the program



### 2 Years of Piloting in Ontario

1

#### 2017-2018

- Piloted in two school boards (10 schools)

2

#### 2018-2019

- Piloted in three school boards
- One school board (six STRONG groups) participated in a feasibility study

### Benefits for Students

Mental well-being plays an important role in learning and academic success. While newcomer students have many strengths, some of them may have mental health challenges due to the many stressors they faced in their migration journeys. Upon arriving in Canada, additional stressors, including racism, acculturation, language differences, and separation from family members, can also interfere with learning, participation, and adjustment in schools.

STRONG is recommended for newcomer students who are struggling with their transition, having peer problems, and/or having challenges with mood, attention, or anxiety. Eligibility for STRONG does not depend on a specific time period since arrival to Canada. It is recommended within students' first five years.

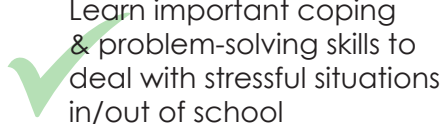
We expect that participation in STRONG will help newcomer students to:



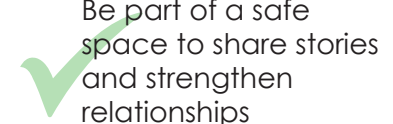
Increase resilience



Improve school connectedness



Learn important coping & problem-solving skills to deal with stressful situations in/out of school



Be part of a safe space to share stories and strengthen relationships

## Why implement STRONG in schools?

For many years, research has shown that newcomer families face many barriers to accessing mental health services. Schools are an excellent setting to bring mental health-focused resources and interventions to newcomer students.

- Schools are often the **first service available** to newcomer students
- There many **caring adults** in schools who can identify concerning behaviours in students for which supports are needed
- Newcomer families **tend to trust schools** as a place to access services
- Hosting mental health services in schools **reduces logistical barriers** to families (such as transportation and childcare)

## How can teachers support students participating in STRONG?



Connect with school administrators to initiate the referral process for newcomer students who may benefit from participating in the STRONG program.



Convey to students that this is an important use of their time and provide assurance that they will be able to keep up with their academics.



Work with STRONG students to create a plan to make up for the lessons they missed for attending the weekly sessions. Missing classes may also be stressful for students, but remind them that the skills learned from STRONG can enhance their academic performance.



Celebrate STRONG students' successes, especially if they demonstrate a new skill in class that they have learned from the STRONG program:

- A new coping skill (e.g., relaxation, appropriate labeling of emotions) to deal with stressful situations such as taking tests or doing classroom presentations.
- A new problem-solving skill such as brainstorming solutions to resolve conflicts, identifying steps to achieve an important goal.

For more information on previous STRONG Pilots, please visit  
[www.csmh.uwo.ca/research/strong.html](http://www.csmh.uwo.ca/research/strong.html)