



**2016-  
2020**

*Everyday Mental Health Classroom  
Resource*

## **Development & Research Case Study**

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School  
Mental Health  
Ontario

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## Executive Summary

The Everyday Mental Health Classroom resource (EDMH) is an intervention that provides a wide selection of high-quality, evidence-informed, everyday mental health practices, designed to fit easily into daily classroom teaching.

**Resource development.** The resource was co-developed by School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO). Specifically, a group of 10 ETFO elementary educators from 10 Ontario school boards, and their respective mental health leaders (MHL), helped co-create the EDMH resource.

**Pilot study findings.** Initial findings revealed that educators who used the resource perceived:

- increased knowledge and confidence to deliver social-emotional learning (SEL) practices
- increased belief in the benefits of SEL
- increased uptake of SEL skills by students over time
- positive effects on their own mental well-being

### Lessons learned about the co-development process and partnerships

#### Planning:

- Scheduling regular, in-person leadership meetings helped build relationships and kept the project's momentum going.
- Discussing ideas and actions internally (between SMH-ON and ETFO) prior to sharing them externally was crucial to support consistent messaging.

#### Co-development:

- Leveraging existing resources and practices from both organizations helped jump-start the co-development process.
- Gathering input from multiple sources resulted in a relevant resource for the end-user.
- Forecasting where additional support might be required helped smooth out the planning process.
- Communicating clearly among project members and stakeholders enhanced the overall planning and pilot project experience.

#### Collaboration:

- Working collaboratively provided a strong foundation to work through challenges.
- Developing partnerships through this pilot study laid the foundation for future collaborative opportunities.
- Co-developing the resource engaged educators in finding ways to support students' mental well-being and opened the door for continued collaborative partnerships.

### Lessons learned about knowledge translation

- Planning and executing deliberate and ongoing communication from the outset helped build authentic partnerships.
- Communicating with all levels of the school system fostered knowledge exchange, encouraged inquiry, and influenced attitudinal shifts.
- Building on and sharing existing knowledge helped increase efficiencies within the system and contributed to positive outcomes for everyone involved.

### Lessons learned from the field-test

Educators requested:

- videos of “live” facilitation of the practices
- a forum/opportunity for peer-to-peer discussion and support.

### Lessons learned from the feasibility pilot

- Engaging the board’s research and evaluation team early and throughout the project strengthens core partnerships in intervention research.

### Lessons learned about implementation

- SMH-ON led an optional province-wide community of practice for mental health leaders (MHLs) who took part in the project.
- Progress updates were provided at SMH-ONs provincial and regional meetings, allowing Mental Health Leaders to brainstorm ways to align the resource with their existing strategies.

### Conclusion

Many of the lessons learned from this pilot have been applied to other projects led by SMH-ON. Key strategies that supported the project’s success include:

- 1) aligning a common vision across the partnering organizations
- 2) tailoring resources to meet end-users’ needs and preferences
- 3) adopting a strong communication strategy and knowledge sharing plan
- 4) remaining flexible to respond to challenges that arise
- 5) engaging stakeholders through communities of practice and implementation support to sustain efforts over time and optimize implementation and scale-up.

### Next Steps

This initial research (including field testing the resource and assessing feasibility and preliminary effectiveness through the pilot study) informed a subsequent trial that assessed efficacy<sup>1</sup> of the EDMH resource in directly improving student’s/youth’s SEL skills.

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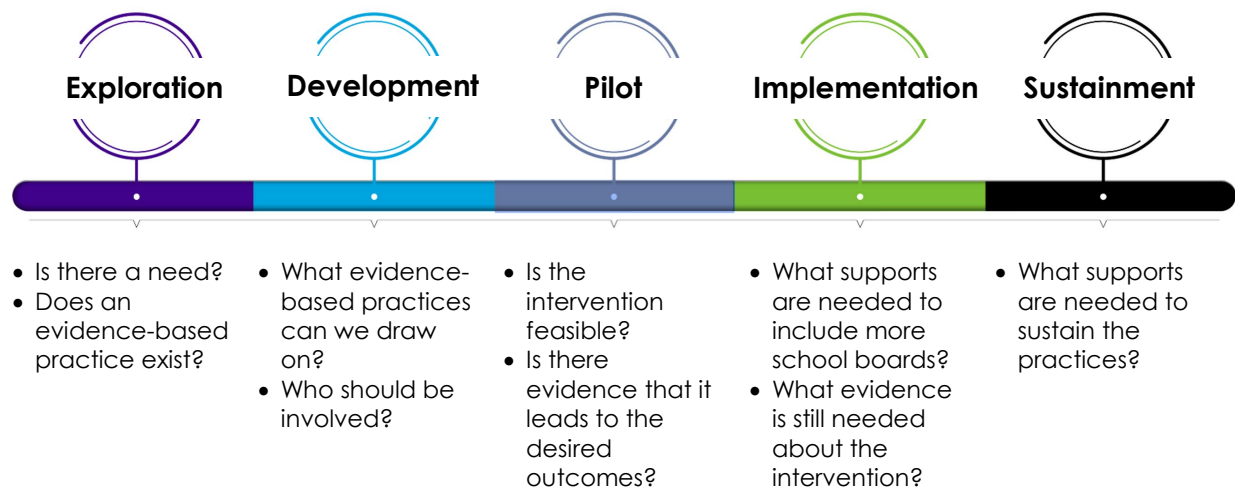
<sup>1</sup> A subsequent trial was conducted with the Faith and Wellness resource, which was co-developed in collaboration between SMH-ON and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA). For more information, please refer to the case study: <https://smho-smso.ca/about-us/innovation-and-scale-up-lab/>

## Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource

To support Ontario elementary educators in their efforts to enhance classroom conditions and build the social emotional learning (SEL) skills of students, the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON—formerly SMH ASSIST) came together to collaboratively develop the Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource (EDMH). Informed by evidence and co-created with educators, the resource offers a variety of practices that bolster SEL skills. For each practice, the EDMH resource provides an outline, implementation instructions, links to related evidence, and much more.

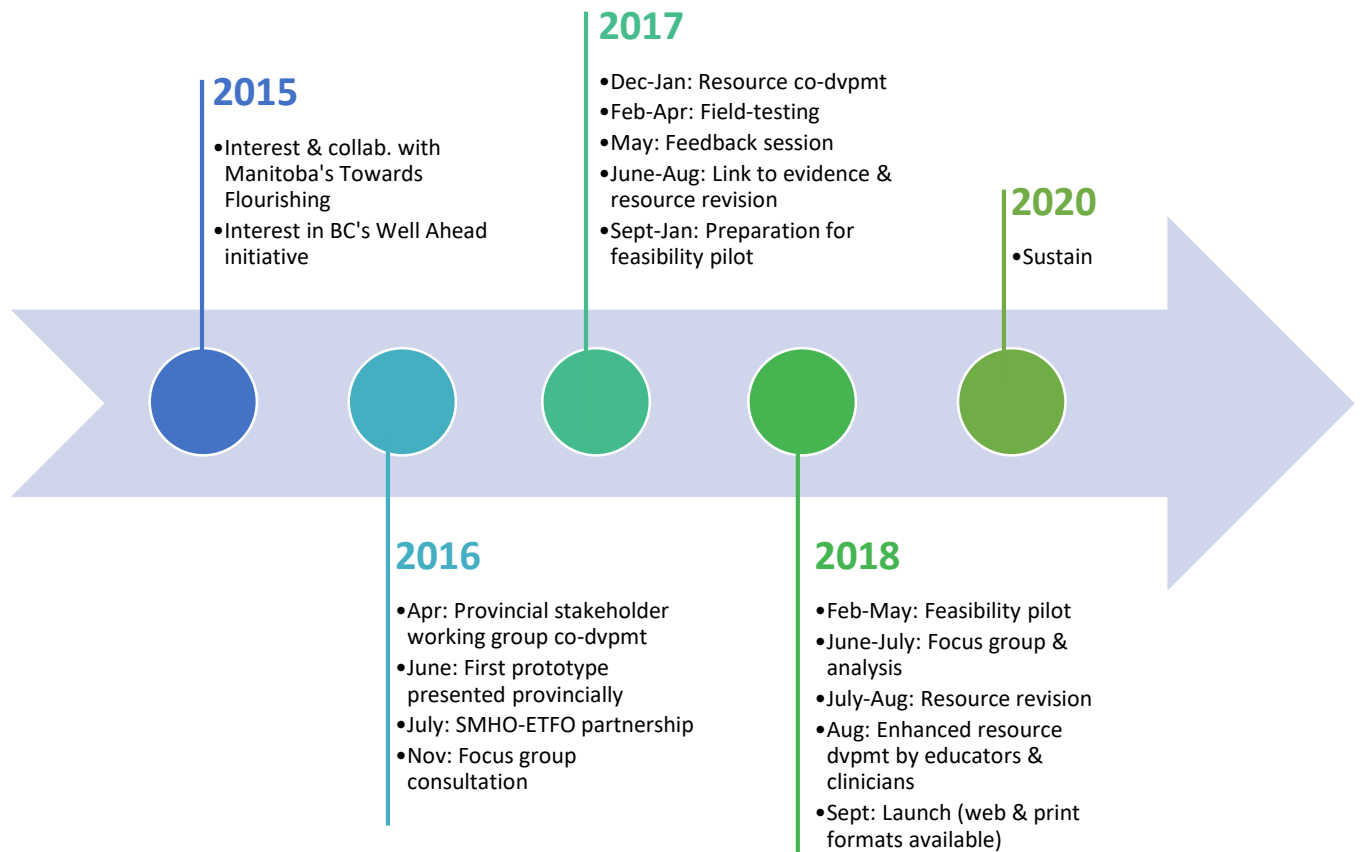
## Phases of Development and Research

This case study describes the process of developing the EDMH resource. Specifically, this study details the following five phases:



While these phases are presented in sequence, in practice, the co-development process was iterative.

## Timeline



## Aiming for Sustainment

Through experience and the research literature, SMH-ON is aware that schools experience barriers, such as a lack of time, funding, training opportunities, and supports, towards adopting traditional manualized evidence-based programs. In this project, SMH-ON aimed to blend evidence with implementation sensitive strategies to help break down these potential barriers.

The vision for this initiative was to identify **evidence-based implementation-sensitive** practices that enhance students' social emotional learning skills that educators could easily adopt in their classrooms.

**Key Point:** Start with a vision

## Phase 1: Exploration

SMH-ON was searching for ways to support evidence-based, universal prevention strategies in Ontario. They wanted feasible strategies that supported students and enhanced school-based mental health promotion offerings.

SMH-ON's idea of introducing everyday mental health practices in classrooms across the province was informed by Manitoba's [Towards Flourishing](#) program. Towards Flourishing is a *Families First Home Visiting Program* designed to support the promotion of mental well-being among parents and their families. This innovative “kernel” approach consists of drawing key “active ingredients” from evidence-based programs and dividing them into 10 simple, easy-to-use parenting strategies. This approach has led to enhanced positive feelings, a sense of independence, and of achievement of relaxation skills amongst participating parents (Chorpita et al., 2007; Embry & Biglan, 2008).

Around the time where Towards Flourishing was starting, the McConnell Foundation and BC's Community Action Initiative, funded [WellAhead.ca](#), an initiative that also uses a kernel approach. to the Well Ahead initiative focussed on six everyday practices that require few resources and can easily fit within the daily routine of schools.

**Key Point:** Explore existing approaches that might support the vision

## First Prototype

SMH-ON decided to explore the kernel approach to everyday mental health practices in Ontario's schools. In the fall of 2015, a small SMH-ON team developed the *Building and Sustaining Mentally Healthy Classroom* module for classroom educators. A key concept in the module was the *Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM)* framework (Figure 1), which identifies what an educator can do, within their scope of practice, to support students at each tier of intervention. The module provided educators with tangible practices that support the five Tier 1 elements (welcome, include, promote, partner, and understand).

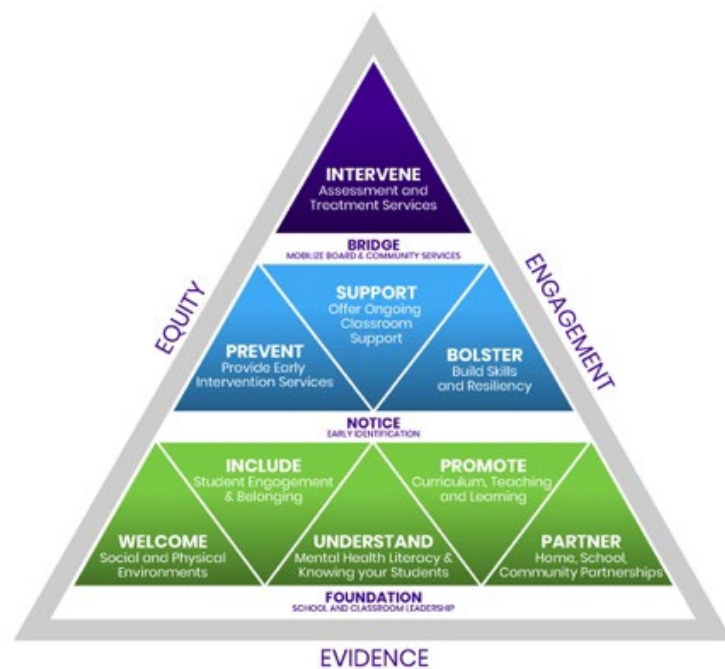


Figure 1: Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM) framework

SMH-ON values the involvement of intended audiences in the co-creation of resources. To begin developing the EDMH resource, SMH-ON formed a *Special Interest Working Group* in April 2016, bringing together practicing educators, child and youth workers, and regulated mental health professionals. The working group brainstormed a variety of practices that could address the five Tier 1 elements in the AIM framework. At that time, there was great enthusiasm expressed for a recipe card format.

The working group generated content and prepared the cards (Figure 2). Each colour-coded card indicated the name of the practice and the targeted AIM category. Instructions included the intended audience, the time required to complete the task, materials needed, desired outcome/goal of the practice, and learning skills/work habits represented.

**Everyday practices that promote well-being**

**GRADE:** All

**TIME NEEDED:** Check-in

**EQUIPMENT:** None

**STUDENTS WILL (GOAL/DESCRIPTION):**

- Students start to notice how they feel and label their emotions/sensations/feelings
- Students are given the space to stop, check-in, and move forward

**LEARNING SKILLS & WORK HABITS REPRESENTED**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

- Give your body a gentle shake
- Close your eyes and notice your body
- Think about how you are feeling right now
- On the count of 3 show how you feel:
  - Thumbs up for good
  - Thumbs sideways for okay
  - Thumbs down for not so good
- Have a few students share how they are feeling (with a feeling word) and why

**THUMBS UP CHECK-IN**

**Include**

Figure 2: Initial prototype of EDMH practice cards

In June 2016, the SMH-ON team introduced the kernel approach to the province's Mental Health Leaders (MHL) and superintendents who are responsible for mental health strategies within their respective boards. This **knowledge mobilization** effort provided an opportunity to discuss the benefits of adopting evidence-based practices that are also implementation-sensitive within schools. A few prototype cards were provided in both French and English. MHLs and superintendents expressed enthusiasm for the proposed practice cards.

As a next step, SMH-ON invited the *Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario* (ETFO) to join the co-development process<sup>2</sup>. Working together with ETFO allowed for teachers' preferences for receiving information were incorporated in the development process (Cunningham et al., 2014).

**Key Point:** Engage with the target audience to co-create a prototype of the resource, inviting in their input from the start

<sup>2</sup> Partnerships with the other teacher federations were sought to co-create a relevant resource for their members. These processes are detailed in separate case studies.



## Ideal Timing

The timing to introduce a resource geared towards classroom mental health promotion strategies seemed ideal: at that time, ETFO members were witnessing an increase in issues related to classroom management, more occurrences of classroom violence, as well as an increase in mental health concerns reported by students. ETFO members were seeking support to help address and prevent these issues.

**Key Point:** Work with key partners from the outset to allow for the resource meets the needs of the end-user

## Exploring Options

In parallel to the partnerships development process, SMH-ON commissioned the Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) to conduct a systematic review and evidence brief outlining the *Common Elements of School-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs* (PSSP, 2017). The purpose of this review was to identify core elements that were common to among published, evidence-based programs that enhance Social Emotional Learning (SEL) among children and youth.

From this review, a total of 15 evidence-based interventions were identified as “common core elements”, defined as an intervention that appeared in at least four separate evidence-based programs.

Subject matter experts narrowed the core elements to the following six categories of SEL:

- Stress management and coping skills
- Identifying and managing emotions
- Positive motivation
- Relationship skills
- Self-confidence and identity skills
- Executive functioning skills

These categories then guided the co-development of the practices.

**Key Point:** Draw recommended strategies from the research literature to build an evidence-based / informed resource.

## Phase 2: Resource Co-Development Phase

### Recruitment of stakeholders to co-develop the resource

In the fall of 2016, ETFO invited its members, including educators and early childhood educators, to participate in the co-development of the EDMH resource. Participants committed to the project for one full school year (2016-2017). Participation included attending three in-person planning sessions, co-developing the resource, and field testing the resource as part of their routine classroom teaching.

Through this process, ten ETFO elementary educators drawn from 10 different school boards joined the project planning team. MHLs from the educators' respective boards were also invited to co-develop the resource. Participants received compensation and travel/accommodation assistance (guided by ETFO member expense guidelines). ETFO project leads kept administrators at each board informed about the project.

**Key Point:** Include a representative sample of end users in the co-development of the resource.

### Co-Development Process

The first meeting took place in the fall of 2016. The participating educators watched a tutorial on elements of a mentally healthy classroom and attended a session, jointly hosted by SMH-ON and ETFO, that explored educator preferences for resource content (Cunningham et al., 2014). During this meeting, the group brainstormed ideas on how best to promote student mental health within everyday classroom settings. Collectively, the planning group identified a roadmap to guide the process for co-developing and field testing the resource.

Between November 2016 and January 2017, the ten educators worked alongside project leads from SMH-ON and ETFO to compile a bank of 100+ everyday mental health practices. Further refinement led to 76 selected practices that had the following characteristics:

- Low or no cost
- Brief (5-10 minutes)
- Easy to implement as part of the daily classroom routines
- Easy to communicate
- Safe and inclusive for all students
- Designed to support SEL skill development in elementary-aged students
- Differentiated in nature
- Not proprietary
- Continuous practice as opposed to a single “one-off” activity
- Evidence-based or evidence-informed

In January 2017, SMH-ON/ETFO hosted an in-person meeting with the ten educators and their school board MHLs. This meeting focussed on the role of the MHLs in supporting the educators as they implemented the resource.

During this meeting, consensus was achieved to include all 76 selected practices, which ranged across six socio-emotional skill categories, in the first draft of the resource. A standardized template was developed, which included the following details: SEL skill category, name of practice, purpose /desired outcome, recommended school division, time and materials required to deliver the practice, detailed instructions and recommended adaptations, evidence brief, and research citations. The practices were supplemented by an Educator Support Guide comprising supporting background research, helpful tips on how to implement the practices, and supplementary resources such as links to apps, videos, and websites.

**Key Point:** Provide a prototype or outline of a resource to jump-start the co-development phase

### Field test process

From February to April 2017, the ten core educators, in conjunction with their MHLs, each invited four additional educators from their school or school board to field test the resource as part of their routine classroom teaching. A total of 38 educators completed the 12-week field test process. The educators were encouraged to reach out to their MHLs for implementation support as required, and to communicate their progress with their school principals.

To field-test the resource, all educators were asked to implement a minimum of one activity/practice per category for a total of six practices. The educators were asked to complete a feedback form to jot down their overall impressions of how the activity was delivered and received. The form gathered information about the following:

- division of practice delivery
- student engagement in and understanding of the practice
- time required to plan, introduce, and deliver the practice
- any adaptations made to the practice
- overall impressions about the practice

Bi-weekly reminder emails containing a URL link to an online feedback form were sent to educators to encourage completion of the forms. Throughout the period of the field testing, participating educators could contact their MHLs for implementation support, as well as the SMH-ON and ETFO leads as needed.

At the end of April 2017, all 38 educators were asked to complete an online reflection tool that gathered anonymous information about the perceived feasibility of implementing the everyday mental health practices within the classroom setting.

Participants received compensation for completing the online reflection. Specific questions included the following:

- How many practices were delivered throughout the 12-week period?
- What grade level were the recipients of the practices?
- What were the educators' overall impressions of the practices?
- What, if any, were some recommended changes to the practices?
- What elements would be helpful to include in a facilitator guide?
- What supports, if any, would enhance the implementation of the practices?

In May 2017, SMH-ON and ETFO invited the ten core educators to attend an in-person feedback session. The purpose of this meeting was to share overall impressions about the project and the resource. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunities to have their feedback and opinions considered throughout each step of the planning process. Overall feedback at this stage indicated the EDMH resource was a good fit for Ontario classrooms.

### Website Content Co-Development

In the summer of 2017, eight of the ten core educators and three of the MHLs spent three days working with SMH-ON and ETFO leads to further refine the *Everyday Mental Health* (EDMH) Classroom resource in its website format (Figure 3). Specific refinements included:

- MHLs provided a rationale to accompany each skill to help explain “why would I want to help students develop this skill”
- The group recommended a series of supplemental resources (with plans to update this list as needed, including both English and French resources)
- SMH-ON created tutorials to provide further instruction and implementation support based on lessons learned in the field testing
- Educators provided testimonials to highlight the benefits of the resource to their colleagues
- SMH-ON made a concerted effort to represent the diversity of students within the various videos, activities, and website.



Figure 3: Screenshot of the *Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource*

**Key Point:** Make changes based on user feedback.

### *Description of EDMH Resource*


The EDMH resource was designed with elementary school educators (K-8) in mind, as they are the facilitators of the classroom teaching practices. The co-development process relied on educators' pre-existing expertise and understanding about how to contextualize each practice to fit the needs of their students. Having a wide range of practices to choose from allows educators to optimize student learning by matching the practices with the learning needs of their students.

## EDMH Practice Cards

Through the co-development process, SMH-ON refined the initial prototype cards to include additional information. In addition to the prototype content, each new practice card included the purpose/rationale, division, and Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) category and core element. PSSP Category and Core Elements include the following:

- Stress management and coping skills
  - Support seeking
  - Stretching
  - Pause & reflect
  - Guided imagery
  - Deep breathing
  - Calm classroom
- Identifying and managing emotions
  - Understanding
  - Recognizing
  - Gauging
- Positive motivation
  - Reframing
  - Practicing perseverance
  - Practicing optimism
  - Expressing gratitude
- Relationship skills
  - Listening
  - Empathy
  - Conflict Resolution
  - Being respectful
  - Being a good friend
  - Acts of kindness
- Self-confidence and identity skills
  - Mattering
  - Knowing oneself
  - Assertive communication
- Executive functioning skills
  - Working memory
  - Problem solving
  - Organization
  - Metacognition
  - Goal setting
  - Decision making

### Coping & Stress Management


  
 SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH ASSIST
   
 ÉQUIPE D'APPUI POUR LA SANTÉ
   
 MENTALE DANS LES ÉCOLES

INSPIRATION FROM ALL	
Purpose	To curate a collection of inspirational resources that can help manage stress, and inspire a sense of meaning, hope, purpose and belonging. This activity provides an opportunity to note what makes something inspiring, and how different people can be inspired in different ways.
Division	Intermediate
Time Required	Each member can spend time in advance to select their contribution, spend 5 minutes sharing, more time for discussion if desired.
Materials	Photocopies or access to technology to share the video, quote, or post.
Instructions	Each day a student is responsible for providing a source of inspiration for the class, like reading out a quote OR a YouTube video (under 2 minutes) OR an Instagram post. Discuss the concept of "inspiration" with the group when introducing the activity and arrange a schedule of when each person will contribute.
Supplementary Resources	"To this day" by Shane Koyczan <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltun92DfnPY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltun92DfnPY</a> Kid President <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-gQLqv9f4o">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-gQLqv9f4o</a>
Adaptations	It can be helpful to discuss the concept of inspiration since it might mean different things to different groups (e.g., spoken word poetry, visual images, organization techniques, puppies...).

### Coping & Stress Management

Evidence	School life can be busy and stressful for intermediate students. Taking a few minutes each day to pause and reflect can be helpful for stress management (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009). Sharing student views about inspiring content can help to create a positive emotional climate in the classroom that models caring behaviour and honours diverse views (Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2013).
References	Chambers, R., Gullone, E., & Allen, N. B. (2009). Mindful emotion regulation: An integrative review. <i>Clinical Psychology Review</i> . doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2009.06.005 Rivers, S. E., Brackett, M. A., Reyes, M. R., Elbertson, N. A., & Salovey, P. (2013). Improving the Social and Emotional Climate of Classrooms: A Clustered Randomized Controlled Trial Testing the RULER Approach. <i>Prevention Science</i> , 14(1), 77-87. doi:10.1007/s11211-012-0305-2

Figure 3: Example EDMH practice card

**Key Point:** Provide resources that are feasible to implement.

## *Knowledge Translation: Optimizing Successful Partnerships*

Communication is key when project collaborators work across different fields, such as the fields of education and mental health (Manojlovich et al., 2015). To facilitate clear communication, SMH-ON and ETFO focussed on sharing language and understanding of each other's priorities. Knowledge translation and exchange was integrated throughout the project to meet the needs of each organization (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2012). Specifically, SMH-ON and ETFO focussed on the following evidence-based strategies:

- working collaboratively across organizations from the start (Campbell, 2010; Hall, Lazarus, & Swannack, 2014)
- building a trusting partnership (Choi et al., 2008; Rockmann & Northcraft, 2008); and
- reaching agreement and tailoring the messaging (and timing of the messaging) to suit the needs of end users from each of the organizations (Campbell, 2010; Hughes et al., 2008).

SMH-ON and ETFO representatives met throughout the project, starting in the fall of 2016. Consensus building on the desired goals, project operations, desired resource(s), and involvement of key stakeholders were prioritized. Next, SMH-ON and ETFO found common ground on how to field test and pilot the resource. They also established an agreed-upon communication strategy. The planning phase, which included the sharing of the resource, lasted two years.

**Key Point:** Communication is a process, not a one-time event

## Knowledge Translation

### *A coordinated and inclusive approach to communication*

SMH-ON and ETFO took a coordinated approach to knowledge translation. One important step was to synchronize the timing of announcements across the two organizations. The SMH-ON leads interacted with its membership, as did the ETFO leads. This communication process, provided a natural forum to ask for clarification about the project when needed, raise any concerns, and provide general feedback.

### *Provincial and Local Leader Engagement*

In addition to keeping the membership within SMH-ON and ETFO informed, the project team also updated external funders (McConnell Foundation) and senior leadership within each of the organizations. News and updates related to the project were shared internally through communication channels such as emails, phone calls and meeting. SMH-ON and ETFO also shared Information with wider audiences during meetings, through newsletter and other publications.



**Key Point:** Synchronize communication flow across participating organizations and tailor messaging to meet end users' needs.

## Knowledge Translation Tactics

The communication strategy was tailored to meet the needs of various target audiences, including educators, MHLs/Local ETFO presidents, SMH-ON and ETFO team members, system senior leaders, and funders. Communication tactics ranged from small group interactive in-person planning meetings with educators, to broad didactic communications to inform wider audiences about progress (Manojlovich et al., 2015; Mei et al., 2004; Rogers, 2003). As an example, ETFO published an article in their ETFO VOICE magazine, which was authored by an educator from the core team. The author described her participation in the project, underscoring her appreciation for having her voice heard and her input considered throughout the development process. She also described to her colleagues her experience using the resource and how it enhanced her teaching practices and positively impacted the group of students she taught. This article, and other communication tactics, helped engage stakeholders in the project and promote the resource to the intended audience.

**Key Point:** Tailor messages to the audience and desired outcome(s)

## Phase 3: Pilot and Evaluation

### Design and Objective

During the 2017-2018 school year, SMH-ON conducted an evaluation to explore the feasibility of implementing the EDMH practices in classroom settings by educators who were not co-developers. The evaluation also examined if the resource enhanced educators':

- knowledge about SEL
- confidence in delivering SEL practices within their classrooms
- beliefs about the benefits of SEL
- perception of classroom climate
- perception of the number of students practicing effective SEL skills

As part of the evaluation, the educators who participated in the feasibility pilot study were also asked to provide input on ways that the resource could be further improved.

During the fall of 2017, ethics approval was granted from the research ethics board at Hamilton Wentworth District School Board for SMH-ON to conduct the evaluation. Following which, SMH-ON reached out to the initial 10 school boards who took part in the initial feasibility pilot, and added an 11<sup>th</sup> board to the list to ensure that all 6 regions



in the province were represented in the study. Approval was then granted by the research and evaluation departments at each of the 11 participating school boards.

## Recruitment

During January and February 2018, SMH-ON and ETFO recruited participants for the pilot and evaluation. Recruitment took place in two ways: 1) through school board communication channels and 2) through local ETFO office communication channels. School boards used a variety of communication/recruitment methods, including email correspondence, invitation flow through MHLs and Principals, as well as word of mouth. In parallel, ETFO recruited participants through their provincial and local e-Newsletters, Facebook, and website channels.

As with all stages of the project, communication around recruitment was synchronized between SMH-ON and ETFO. An unanticipated benefit of this communication strategy was the formation and/or enhancement of collaborations between MHLs and the local ETFO leaders.

## Methods

### Procedures

Interested participants were emailed a link to an online consent form that provided information about the nature of the study, and the requirements for participation. These included:

- completion of a baseline survey assessing existing knowledge and confidence in teaching SEL skills, perceived influence on classroom climate and student uptake
- implementation of a minimum of two practices per skill category (N=6) with students from their own classroom(s), for a total of 12 practices over three months
- completion of an online post-implementation survey, which repeated the same questions as the baseline survey
- participation in an online discussion group hosted by SMH-ON and ETFO to share their feedback on the resource and its implementation (optional)

### Participants

In total, 456 educators completed the consent form. A sub-group of those completed the baseline survey once they reviewed the consent form and were provided access to the resource. By the end of the pilot phase, a total of 153 teachers completed both the baseline and post-pilot survey.

## *Summary of Findings from the Feasibility and Preliminary Effectiveness Pilot*

### Intended Outcomes

SMH-ON analyzed the pre- and post- survey data using descriptive statistics and regression modeling. The findings, which were exclusively shared in individualized reports to participating boards, revealed improvements in participants' knowledge and confidence to deliver social emotional learning practices. The participants' expressed

more positive beliefs about the benefits of SEL by the end of the pilot study. Additionally, there were improvements over time in educators' perceptions of classroom climate, and in perceived uptake of the SEL practices by their students. Overall, educators found the practices to be:

- short, accessible, and easy to deliver
- easily modified for students of different ages
- interactive and fun in nature
- easily understood by students

Additionally, 84% of educators reported that they found the resource very or extremely helpful, while 95% would recommend the resource to other educators within and outside their division and roles. Lastly, educators reported that the resource increased their comfort level to deliver classroom-based social-emotional learning practices. Of note, educators in their open-ended feedback shared that the practices appeared to benefit their own mental well-being.

The dosage / frequency of use of the resource was measured. The findings indicated that educators who used the resource with moderate frequency (5-8 times per week), demonstrated improvement in perceptions of classroom climate; while those who used the resource with higher frequency (8 to 12 times per week) reported improvements in their knowledge about and confidence in their skills to deliver SEL practices with students. Notably, educators who reported the highest use of the resource (more than 12 times per week) reported a perceived increase in the uptake of SEL skills by their students.

**Key Point:** Explore dosage (i.e., amount/frequency of use) to determine implementation thresholds

## Phase 4: Implementation

### *Preparing for Implementation*

The SMH-ON/ETFO team was mindful of implementation considerations from the outset. Lessons learned from the pilot were shared with provincial members of SMH-ON and ETFO to facilitate strategic planning for scale up across the province.

**Key Point:** Plan for implementation at the beginning of a project, not at the end

### *Launch*

As SMH-ON supports all 72 school boards and four school authorities in Ontario, prior to the September 2018 launch by both organizations, the province-wide resource needed to be ready in both French and English.

### ETFO's support for launching the resource

To raise awareness among ETFO members and local leaders about the EDMH resource, ETFO leads developed a communication plan. Strategies to support the launch of the resource included:

- Adding information about the EDMH resource onto the ETFO website, in e-Newsletters, on Twitter and Facebook
- Co-developing a one-page flyer with SMH-ON
- Sharing the resource and a one-page explanation flyer at ETFO-hosted events, (e.g. Fall Leadership Conference, Rep Council Meetings, In Still We Rise Conference, ETFO AQ Courses, distribution through ETFO Standing Committees)
- Providing camera-ready material for locals to use in their communications to members (e.g. through their websites, Facebook pages, mass emails, etc.)
- Providing information about the availability of the EDMH resource through ETFO's VOICE magazine.

### SMH-ON's support for launching the resource

SMH-ON communicated the launch of the EDMH resource to MHLs and SOs who were responsible for the mental health portfolio within their board. The goal was to raise awareness about the resource, align it with the provincial and board-level MHA strategies, and optimize its effective uptake by educators by providing routine implementation support. SMH-ON leveraged its established provincial network of school board leaders to cascade the information at both provincial and regional level meetings and events (e.g., during these large and medium scale meetings, the website was presented, and a brief tutorial on its features was offered).

**Key Point:** Work towards a common and collaborative launch strategy between project partners to support the successful uptake of the resource.

## Phase 5: Sustainment

The development of the EDMH resource aligned with both SMH-ON's vision for school mental health and ETFO's focus on prioritizing its members expertise in developing resources that fit with students' needs. Subsequent to the co-development of this resource, the work continues. Various efforts are being made to further refine and integrate EDMH practices into routine daily teaching practices. Below we provide examples of these efforts.

*Example 1:* Since 2019, SMH-ON has worked with the Ministry of Education to embed the following six SEL skills (with slightly adapted category names—see below) directly within the K-8 curriculum:

- Stress management and coping skills
- Identification and management of emotions

- Self-awareness and sense of identity
- Critical and creative thinking (executive functioning)
- Healthy relationship skills
- Positive motivation and perseverance

*Example 2:* SMH-ON has embedded training related to the facilitation of the EDMH resource in the elementary and secondary MH LIT Mental Health In Action course (<https://SMH-ON-smso.ca/educators/learn-more/mh-lit-online-course/>).

*Example 3:* SMH-ON has developed EDMH practice posters for elementary and secondary classrooms that can be downloaded free (<https://SMH-ON-smso.ca/blog/online-resources/sel-posters/>).

*Example 4:* ETFO partnered with a group of educators to examine ways to bring a social justice lens/framework to this resource. Specifically, during ETFO's *2019 Racialized Members' Conference*, three members who were part of the pilot confirmed that they thought the EDMH was useful in helping students struggling with multiple forms of oppression.

*Example 5:* ETFO included the EDMH resource in the 2019-2020 Professional Learning/Curriculum Services department workshop series—*Supporting Students in Regular Classrooms: Mental Health Matters*—which was delivered to ETFO local teacher unions.

*Example 6:* More recently, ETFO and SMH-ON showcased the EDMH resource in a webinar they presented together on May 12, 2020 on the topic *Understanding and Responding to Student Anxiety in the Context of COVID-19*.

*Example 7:* SMH-ON adapted the resource for use with parents to enhance uptake of SEL skills in the home environment. (<https://SMH-ON-smso.ca/blog/12-easy-and-fun-mental-health-practices-to-try-with-your-children-at-home/>)

*Example 8:* As part of routine coaching support, MHLs and SOs have been discussing the EDMH resource and ways it can be integrated with other mental health and addiction work prioritized by school boards.

**Key Point:** Plan for sustainment from the start.  
Build from the vision and aim to embed the resource into daily practice

## Lessons Learned

Below we summarise the lessons learned through this case study.

### About the co-development process and partnerships

- Scheduling regular, in-person leadership meetings helped build relationships and keep the project's momentum going.

- Discussing internally how to convey messages about the project prior to sharing ideas and actions outside the planning group provided opportunities for SMH-ON and ETFO to educate each other on context and language used in each organization and allowed for consistent, user-friendly communications across the two organizations. Both organizations were open to learning about each other's perspectives and acknowledged shared and unique areas of expertise.
- Collaborating on the project and through the planning group provided a strong foundation to work through challenges – everyone was committed to moving the project forward.
- Leveraging existing resources and practices from both organizations helped to jump-start and quickly build the co-development and implementation of the resource.
- Gathering input from multiple sources (e.g., MHLs, SMH-ON/ETFO leads, ETFO Senior Administrators, ETFO members) resulted in a relevant resource for the intended audience.
- Forecasting, where possible, where additional support might be required helped to smooth out the planning process.
- Coordinating a strong communication flow among project members and with additional stakeholders enhanced the overall planning and pilot project experience.
- Developing partnerships during this pilot study set the foundation for further collaborative opportunities.
- Co-developing the resource effectively engaged educators in finding ways to support their students' mental well and opened the door for continued collaborative partnerships

### About Knowledge Mobilization

- Planning and executing deliberate and ongoing communication from the outset helped the team build an authentic partnership, where people's voices, experiences, and unique knowledge were valued and incorporated into the resource.
- Extending the communication flow to all levels of the school system created a culture of knowledge exchange and fostered potential attitudinal shifts at a systems level.
- Building on and sharing existing knowledge helped increase efficiencies within the system, and contributed to positive outcomes for everyone involved.

### From the field-testing

- Educators requested videos of live facilitation of the practices by educators.
- Educators wanted a forum / opportunity for peer discussion and support about their experiences in facilitating the practices (e.g., what worked, what needed to be changed, how did students respond).

### From the feasibility pilot

- Engaging the boards' research and evaluation team early and throughout the project strengthened core partnerships in intervention research.

### About implementation:

- During the initial implementation process, SMH-ON led a province-wide community of practice for the MHLs who took part in the project. These monthly, 1-hour, optional calls were well attended, and topics were generated by the MHLs who participated on the call. Topics included: how to reach educators, how to share the resource once it's launched, how to work collaboratively with new partners. Peer-to-peer strategies were shared to enhance the uptake of the resource.
- Progress updates were provided at provincial and regional meetings, allowing leaders to brainstorm ways to align the resource with their existing strategies.

## Conclusion

The co-development of the EDMH classroom resource led to a successful collaborative partnership between SMH-ON and ETFO, and the resource was well received by educators. Many of the lessons learned from this pilot have been applied to other SMH-ON projects.

**Key lessons** worth replicating include:

- 1) aligning a common vision across the partnering organizations
- 2) tailoring resources to meet the end-users' needs and preferences
- 3) adopting a strong communication strategy and knowledge sharing plan
- 4) remaining flexible to respond to challenges that arise
- 5) engaging stakeholders through communities of practice and implementation support to sustain efforts over time and optimize implementation and scale-up.

## Limitations

The pilot phase led to the selection of measures (informed by the research literature and developed for the pilot test) that were tested for reliability. However, the generalizability of the pilot findings are limited because the testing used a relatively small convenience sample and did not include a comparison group nor randomization. In addition, as the completion rate for the pilot was about 30% of those who initially consented to participate, our initial positive findings reflect a particular subset of engaged educators.

## Next Steps

This initial research, including field testing the resource and assessing feasibility and preliminary effectiveness through the pilot study, set the stage for a subsequent trial to more formally assess the efficacy of the EDMH resource. A subsequent trial examined whether the resource improves the SEL skills of students/youth<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The subsequent trial was conducted with the Faith and Wellness resource, which was co-developed in collaboration between SMH-ON and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA). For more information: <https://smho-smso.ca/about-us/innovation-and-scale-up-lab/>

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# Innovation and Scale Up Lab (ISU)



## Mission:





The Innovation and Scale Up Lab's mission is to examine and advance evidence-based and implementation-sensitive approaches within school mental health, and to mobilize both research and practice evidence to enhance quality, consistency, scalability, and sustainability in Ontario schools.

## Vision:

The Innovation and Scale-Up Lab (ISU) will become a globally-recognized hub for research and innovation in scalable and sustainable practices for school mental health.

The ISU Lab will identify and share common implementation lessons that can inform work in Ontario and other jurisdictions using consistent methodologies, and drawing on a range of prototypes.

## To move this agenda forward, through the ISU Lab we:

-  Seek out promising research and practice examples
-  Partner with key stakeholders to ensure that proposed innovations meet a clear and specific need
-  Study innovations to ensure that promising approaches are evidence-based and implementation-sensitive within the context of Ontario
-  Share lessons from promising approaches and engage in related knowledge mobilization and dissemination

## ISU Lab Projects, to date:

### Tier One, Universal Mental Health Promotion

- Everyday Mental Health (ETFO, OECTA, OSSTF, AEFO)
- Bell Let's Talk in the Classroom (LTIC)
- Skills4Life Career Studies SEL (S4L/H2V)

### Tier Two, Prevention and Early Intervention

- Brief Intervention for School Clinicians (BRISC)
- Supporting Transition Resilience of Newcomer Groups (STRONG/FORT)
- Feeling calm, Increasing motivation, Repairing thoughts, Solving problems, Trying the opposite (FIRST)

*We strive to bring knowledge into action and action into knowledge.*