



Supporting Student Health Guide

Secondary (2022)



Ministry of
Education and
Child Care

Contents

Introduction	4
General Suggestions for Teaching Health Topics	5
Getting started.....	5
Disclosure	6
Supporting Student Health: Sexual Health	7
Notes on language	7
Daily classroom practices	8
Follow-up	8
Resources to Consider	8
Topic: Consent.....	9
Definition	9
Considerations	9
Instructional strategies.....	11
Responding to the unexpected in your classroom	15
Topic: Internet Safety	16
Considerations	16
Instructional strategies.....	17
Catfishing.....	17
Cyberbullying	18
Digital footprint	18
Legalities.....	19
Sexting/nudes	19
Non-Consensual Disclosure of Intimate Images.....	20
Topic: Healthy Relationships	20
Considerations	20
Instructional strategies.....	21
Communication	21
Abusive relationships.....	22
Gender-Based Violence (GBV).....	22
Exploitation	22
Respect.....	23
Peer pressure.....	23
Responding to the unexpected in your classroom	23
Resources to Consider	24
Topic: Healthy Sexual Decision Making	24

Considerations	24
Instructional strategies	24
Legalities	24
Sexually transmitted infections	24
Pornography	25
Topic: Safer Sex (Including STIs)	26
Considerations	26
Instructional strategies	26
Responding to the unexpected in your classroom	27
Resources to Consider	28
Supporting Student Health: Mental Health	28
Notes on language	28
Daily classroom practices	29
Follow-up	30
Topic: Body Image	30
Considerations	30
Instructional strategies	30
Topic: Stress	31
Considerations	31
Instructional strategies	32
Responding to the unexpected in your classroom	32
Topic: Stigma	33
Considerations	33
Instructional strategies	33
Topic: Coping Strategies	34
Considerations	34
Instructional strategies	35
Responding to the unexpected in your classroom	35
Resources	35
K-Grade 10 Suggested Topics	37
Sample Letter to Send Home	41
Alternative Delivery Policy	42
Glossary of Key Terms	44

Introduction

The provincial curriculum has brought together physical education and health education in order to develop all aspects of well-being and emphasize the connections between physical, intellectual, mental, sexual and social health. This approach promotes a deeper and more holistic understanding of overall health and well-being in students.

While B.C. teachers have embraced a variety of different physical education approaches, they have often lacked the resources to teach health education topics with confidence, particularly in relation to sexual and mental health topics. In response to the need for additional support for these critical health topics, the Ministry of Education and Child Care is pleased to have worked with teachers to produce a guide to Supporting Student Health for elementary and secondary teachers.

This guide is not meant to be a step-by-step manual. Instead, it is meant to provide teachers with a useful starting point for teaching a variety of health education topics. It contains some general guidance on teaching health education topics, along with suggestions for teaching specific topics, including instructional approaches and how to respond to unexpected situations, which they can adapt to meet the needs of their students. This guide is also not meant to be a complete source of information about these health topics. While this guide contains helpful advice and suggestions for teachers, teachers will need to do additional research and development based on the needs of their students, community considerations, and other factors unique to their particular classroom.

As part of the comprehensive approach to student health and well-being, teachers are encouraged to treat health education as a regular, ongoing area of study rather than a once-a-year event. Many schools currently rely on presentations by specialist health educators to cover these important health topics. While this avoids the discomfort that can arise when teaching these sensitive topics, having classroom teachers explore them with their students helps build an ongoing conversation about health education. As students become more familiar with and comfortable talking about these issues, they may have questions that come up throughout the year that can't be adequately answered through a one-time presentation.

A note on teacher well-being

Student well-being begins with teacher well-being, and it is important for teachers to take care of themselves in order to take care of their students.

The health education outcomes are an important part of the curriculum, and teachers can play a vital role in promoting student well-being, such as through directing students to valuable resources. While doing this very important work with students, please be aware of both your limitations as a teacher and your needs for mental wellness as a person:

- *Teachers are not medical professionals, and there are limits to a teacher's responsibilities.*
- *Be aware of your legal responsibilities related to referral and disclosure.*
- *Seek support for your own mental well-being.*
- *And be aware of the signs of compassion fatigue, such as indifference to the problems of others, isolating yourself, and feelings of hopelessness.*

Having classroom teachers address these topics also contributes to the overall goal of helping normalize conversations about mental and sexual health issues. One of the main goals of combining physical and health education is to remove the stigma from health education topics and promote mental and sexual health for students in the same way that we promote physical health.

General Suggestions for Teaching Health Topics

Getting started

- Rather than teaching all health topics in a single short, concentrated period of time, spread health topics throughout the year. (See Resources for a suggested timeline.)
- Send home a letter to parents and guardians in September outlining the topics you will be covering throughout the year. (See Resources for a template.)
 - Whenever possible, meet parents in person to discuss any concerns and questions regarding a topic. Sometimes all parents need to hear is that the primary purpose of the curriculum is to protect and empower students.
 - See the Alternative Delivery Policy to understand parent rights and obligations. All students must receive Health curriculum instruction.
- Incorporate Health into your regular scheduling and planning. Use this period to teach about mental health and sexual health throughout the year.
- Include comments about the Health curriculum in report cards to validate the importance of these topics.
- Find out if you have a colleague who is passionate about teaching Health and with whom you could co-teach, collaborate, or platoon.
- If another teacher covers Physical and Health Education with your students, talk to your colleagues about topics that they are covering, and supplement in your class.
- Introduce all aspects of health: mental, physical, social, sexual, and how they are connected.
- Students will have different levels of background knowledge about these topics. Adapt as necessary and be aware of what is age-appropriate.
 - Gauge where your class is and revise as necessary (e.g., defining gender, sex, orientation, stigma, depression, and anxiety).



- Be aware of student diversity and adapt your activity/ lesson as needed. It is important to seek out and use examples that are culturally relevant to students. For example:
 - Students who are English Language Learners will benefit from simple language and visuals.
 - Students with autism spectrum disorder may need additional instruction for topics such as emotions, social cues, and body language.
- Be aware of the potential impact of racism and discrimination on student health. For example, the [“In Plain Sight” report](#) outlined how inequitable health care access and racism can contribute to poorer health outcomes for Indigenous people. The experience of racism is associated with higher rates of self-reported distress, suicidal ideation, and substance use amongst First Nations people.
- Students and educators who have experienced trauma may be triggered by some lessons in the Health curriculum. Be mindful of difficult subjects, provide advance notice of sensitive topics, and monitor you and your students’ behaviour throughout the lesson. Develop a safety plan for students who may need to leave the room.
- Preview videos and other content before showing to your students.
- If possible, try to plan your lessons before a break (recess or lunch) and not a major school break (winter, spring, summer) so students can speak to you in private or follow up with a school counselor or other professional if needed. Remember your responsibilities around disclosure.

Disclosure

- If a student asks a question or says something that you think might be a disclosure of abuse or harm:
 - Find a natural way to stop the lesson and ask students to do an alternative activity. Speak to the student in private, show empathy, honour the student, and offer support.
 - Clarify the student’s statement and get the essential facts (how, who, what, and when; avoid why) to help you decide whether to make a report.
 - Once you have gathered enough information, stop asking questions. As a teacher it is not your job to interview the student.
 - Take detailed notes as soon as possible.
 - Remind the student that they are not in trouble and tell them that you will get them help (but avoid making promises).

The [Child, Family and Community Service Act \(CFCSA\)](#) requires that anyone who has reason to believe that a child or youth has been or is likely to be abused or neglected must report the suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker.

Learn more in the [B.C Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect For Service Providers](#), which has been revised to clarify reporting requirements regarding children and youth living in situations where there is domestic violence.

You can also find out more at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse>

For information on B.C. policies and legislation related to victims in the criminal justice system, please visit this [website](#), as well as for age specific information on [crime examples](#) in the province, and facts on [sexual assault](#).

To report child abuse and neglect in B.C., call 1-800-663-9122.

Supporting Student Health: Sexual Health

Notes on language

- Use gender inclusive language and terminology, as well as ensure any discussion on sexual health topics is done in a non-judgmental way. Doing so will help normalize the conversation.
- Create a space where you model the language and attitude of consent:
 - For example, when helping students to resolve a situation or conflict, ask whether the person who didn't like the behaviour said "stop." If they did, say to the other person, "Stop means stop and no means no. Nobody should ever have to say it twice." If they did not say "stop," encourage them to use their voice, and if the behaviour doesn't stop to seek help from a trusted adult.
 - It is important to be aware, however, that in the sexual context, it is not legally necessary to say "no"; in other words, the absence of "no" does not mean "yes"; rather the onus is on the initiator to seek "communicated consent".
 - Remind students that just because someone doesn't actually say "stop" or "no" doesn't mean they mean "yes." This is applicable in many contexts and can be reinforced early and often (e.g., with "playful" teasing or pushing between friends, tapping someone on the head).
 - Sometimes the "instigator" isn't *trying* to bother the "survivor/victim." They may be friends, they may think they are being funny, or they may have another reason for doing what they're doing. Take this opportunity to ask the person whose behaviour was unwanted if it looked like the other person was enjoying it, or if they looked uncomfortable. It is the student's responsibility to ask themselves if the other person looks like they feel comfortable and, if they aren't sure, to check in and ask the other person.

- If you notice someone who is “bugging” another person, you can intervene. You don’t have to wait until they tell the teacher, as some (or possibly many), students won’t feel comfortable telling on a friend or classmate.
- Sexual assault is always the fault of the assailant, and the victim should never be blamed for things that have happened to them. However, students also need to be aware of situations that put them at higher risk of potentially being assaulted. In particular, the use of alcohol is involved in one-third to one-half of sexual assaults. Again, the use of alcohol doesn’t mean the victim of an assault is to blame, but it is a significant factor in many assaults.
- Trust your gut feelings. If you feel uncomfortable and worry that you are in a dangerous situation, you’re probably right and you should listen to your instincts. Many survivors of sexual assault report having had a “bad feeling” about the situation prior to being assaulted. If a situation feels bad or you start to get nervous about someone’s behavior, establish boundaries with them immediately and leave as soon as possible.

Daily classroom practices

- Provide the class with an anonymous “Question Box” and ask them to write questions **or** one thing they learned that day, without writing their names. Since everyone will be writing something, students will feel safe to ask. If possible, keep the Question Box available so that students can ask any questions that arise later. Remember that you can always revisit a topic at a later date if you discover a better way to answer a question.
- Don’t impose your beliefs and values on the topics covered (e.g., people must be married to have sex).
- If you are confronted with a difficult question, ensure that you have understood the question and they have understood the answer by saying: “What I hear is that you’re curious about ____” [Answer the question.] “Did that answer your question?” Ensure that their curiosity about a topic has been satisfied appropriately.
 - If students still have questions, or you don’t feel comfortable answering a certain question in the moment, say that they are good questions and that you will find good answers. Seek support and answer the question(s) during your next lesson.

Follow-up

- Provide students with specific instructions for accessing resources and support. For example, contact local health authorities to get current phone numbers and websites for resources, or show students how to get to the closest resources on foot, by bus, and so on.

Resources to Consider

- The BC Government identifies important [inclusive language and terms](#) to ensure using language that is free from prejudice, stereotypes or discriminatory views of specific people or groups.

- You can also find more using [Words Matter: Guidelines on Using Inclusive Language in the Workplace](#)
- Trans Care BC: The Provincial Health Services Authority, created [Gender Inclusive Language](#) to help identify language signals to help improve gender-affirming care within BC services.

Topic: Consent

Definition

Consent is an agreement to engage in an activity and occurs when you ask, or give, permission to do something. Consent is used and should be used within daily life interactions and/or activities – such as asking for food or drink, taking a picture and posting it on social media, physical touching, or participating in an activity.

For further information on what is and what is not consent, please visit our website:

[What is consent? - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

Considerations

- Create a space where you model the language and attitude of consent and build a culture of consent in your classroom. This goes well beyond the PHE classroom and instead should be part of a whole school culture.
 - Fundamental in demonstrating consent is to ensure a **'yes means yes'** narrative – shifting away from the 'no means no' model. Granted there will be times you will need to speak and teach what "no" and "stop" means (i.e., resolving a situation or conflict after the fact), but the basis of our practice and how we model consent should be ensuring that an initiator needs to ask for permission first and obtain a verbal yes before proceeding in any action/activity.
- Consent does not need to be a taboo topic and is about more than sex. While issues of consent definitely exist in sexual relationships, consent issues exist throughout life and make for very interesting discussions with students. Consent issues could include a variety of examples, such as borrowing a friend's sweater without asking, sharing a photo of a friend without consent, or sharing a secret without permission. These are situations that have happened to every student and discussing them helps reinforce principles that apply to consent in intimate relationships. Normalize conversations in your class about respecting the bodily autonomy of other people. This starts with teacher leadership in the classroom. While it can potentially be slightly disruptive for students to be moving around during classes, denying a student the ability to go to the washroom or meet other bodily needs is an example of not respecting the bodily autonomy of students.
 - Have conversations with students about the importance of trust and how if you trust students and give them the freedom to meet their bodily needs, you expect that students won't abuse this right and will make good choices.

- Students should be aware that their bodies belong to them and that their bodies are not for others to use or exploit. Students also need to apply this to their interactions (sexual and/or otherwise) with others as well and acknowledge that other people are not for them to use or exploit.
- It is also important to acknowledge that not receiving consent can sometimes make people feel bad (e.g., being rejected), particularly when there is positive intent behind a request. For example, if a student wants to give a friend a hug and are told no, it's natural to feel sad. Encouraging empathy and understanding is important and can be introduced with many common examples. For example, a student might normally enjoy getting a hug from their friend but may not want to hug at a given moment because they are feeling sick or just want to be alone.
 - Regardless of the reason, boundaries should be respected, and people shouldn't be made to feel guilty for not giving someone consent to do anything. Practicing asking for consent as well as giving, receiving and accepting "no" as an important element of establishing and respecting boundaries.
 - The goal is for discussions of consent to be regular and for all people to get used to asking for consent and to be comfortable both saying no and accepting no as an answer.
- Take violations of consent seriously and use smaller examples as teaching opportunities. For example, something as simple as one student taking another student's pen is an example to reinforce acceptable and unacceptable behaviour regarding consent. In the example of taking another student's pen, the perpetrator will often say things like "what's the big deal?" but it is important to ensure that students understand that even seemingly small violations of consent are not acceptable and show a lack of respect for others.
 - While dealing with seemingly minor issues can feel frustrating, these small violations can reinforce that consent is optional.
 - Be aware that some students will try and excuse non-consensual behaviours, such as saying "it's ok, we were just joking around." While this is sometimes true, this is also sometimes done to try and save face or not look like they were "tattling" on a classmate. Don't contradict a student, but instead emphasize that while you appreciate that in this case it was just a joke, in your classroom you expect that students will ask for permission before touching another student or taking their property.
- Be aware of signs that indicate risk factors, such as a student who uses misogynist language in the class or "jokes" about violence. Students are exposed to a wide variety of messages related to relationships. Students may come from a household where they are exposed to gender-based violence or listen to media sources that objectify women or reinforce negative stereotypes.
- Remind them that just because someone doesn't actually say "stop" or "no" doesn't mean they mean "yes." This is applicable in many contexts and can be reinforced early and often (e.g., with "playful" teasing or pushing between friends, tapping someone on the head).

- Showing respect to our elders is often a primary driving force/fear in students allowing unwanted contact to occur, especially when it comes to someone who is a close relative, family friend, teacher, coach, and so on. So make sure that students understand their right to say no to unwanted touch or interactions.
 - Talk to students about their control of their bodies. Students should not be forced to have unwanted physical contact. This can be difficult for adults, particularly for older relatives where social norms were different. However, these can be communicated in a positive way and lead to important conversations at home.
- Can use the FRIES acronym as a mnemonic device for key consent principles:
 - F – Freely Given. Decisions about sexual activities should be made without pressure, force, intimidation, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
 - R – Reversible. Even if you have agreed to do something, you can change your mind, even during sex. Consent is ongoing and not a one-time thing.
 - I – Informed. Consent includes honesty, such as using protection if you have agreed to do it.
 - E – Enthusiastic. Consent should be enthusiastic and stated using a verbal yes; your partner shouldn't look or sound unhappy about doing something.
 - S – Specific. Your partner agreeing to do one thing does not mean they have consented to other things, you need to check with your partner before going further.
- In Canada, the age of consent is 16, with exceptions for younger people if they are close in age to each other. For specific details, see the federal Department of Justice guidelines on consent at <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/other-autre/clp/faq.html>.
- Consent can never be given, even by adults, if the person is in a position of trust or authority. For students, this would include a teacher or a coach. Also, for anyone under 18, consent can never be given if the sexual activity is exploitative (e.g., pornography or providing sexual services for payment or other consideration)
- Under the age of 18, consent can never be given if the person is in a position of authority (e.g., a teacher or coach) or if the sexual activity is exploitative (e.g., pornography or prostitution). It is important to be clear in your communication and to speak up and clearly say “no!” or “stop!” if you are uncomfortable with something. While consent should be enthusiastic, some people (especially people on the autism spectrum) may have difficulty reading body language.
- Use gender inclusive language, as anyone from any sex can be both the survivor(s)/victim(s) and perpetrator(s) of sexual assault.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering this topic with your students could include the following:

- Refer to the elementary Supporting Student Health guide for additional ideas for teaching about consent and modify to make them more age-appropriate.

- Go through the FRIES mnemonic to help teach students key points.
- Discuss with students why consent is important and the potential consequences (legal trouble, relationships, etc.) of not engaging in activities with consent.
 - Important to cover how there are some situations where, for students under 18, consent can never be given.
 - It is also important not to exaggerate to scare students. For example, people can have an innocent misunderstanding (e.g., miscommunication about a particular activity) in a good relationship that can be discussed and solved.
 - Emphasize how being pressured or forced into non-consensual activities is not the survivor/victim's fault and encourage them to talk to the proper authorities.
 - Encourage people to support their friends and not be judgmental.
- Have students create scenarios where two people are discussing consent.
 - Have them use the FRIES principles and illustrate things like how to ask about doing something, how to say no, and how to negotiate consent (e.g., "I'm not ready to have sex but we can make out.")
 - Students could do this in a variety of forms, such as a roleplaying activity in pairs or an individual activity such as a story or comic strip.
- Discuss handling rejection in a healthy and positive way
 - Ask students what is the difference between rejection and refusal?
 - How does a refusal or rejection make you feel and how might people react in those situations? How do we react in healthy ways?
 - Rejection and refusal are very normal and common parts of life and in many situations are important parts in making sure everyone is safe and respected.
- Remind students that not all physical touches (hugging, handholding, etc.) are bad; in fact, they usually make us feel good!
 - When we have physical touch, our brains make something called dopamine that makes us feel happy and less stressed. This is why people usually like to receive and give physical touch. It's totally normal to want to hug someone!
 - As the person who wants to do the touching (which feels good), you need to look at the person you want to touch and see if they look like they want to receive physical touch. This can be hard, so it's a good idea to ask if you aren't sure.
- Run through some different scenarios with your class (adapting as necessary for age):
 - A friend wants to hold your hand, but you don't want to. Is it okay to say no? (Yes. It doesn't mean you don't like your friend. Discuss)
 - You are kissing someone, but then you decide you don't feel like it anymore. Is it okay to stop? (Yes, it's okay to change your mind. Discuss)

- You run up to an adult in the school and want to give them a hug. Is this okay? (No, you have to ask permission to give hugs. Discuss how this applies to all people.)
- If you are hugging someone, can you give them a kiss? (No, just because someone is OK with one thing doesn't mean you don't need permission to go further.)
- Explain to students that it is important to practice asking for consent, giving consent, and saying no. This helps students build resilience when asking for a hug and being told no or being the one saying "no, thank you." However, it is important to distinguish inappropriate touch, which is never okay.
 - Have students practice asking for consent (high-fives, hugs, handshakes), giving consent if they are comfortable), and saying no.
 - Ensure that all students practice saying no in a strong voice. If students feel shy or uncomfortable saying no to their friends, offer them strategies like smiling and saying "no, thank you" or doing something different with their hands, like waving or giving a thumbs-up.
- Explain to students that they will never be in trouble for saying no to an adult or friend. The student decides what happens with their body and no one else gets to decide.
 - If someone is making them feel bad because they are choosing not to give consent, then that person is not being a good friend.
- Remind students that when someone is not giving them consent, it's not fair or right to get mad or upset. Treat others how you would like to be treated!
 - It's acceptable and normal to not give consent. You can just respond by saying "that's cool!" or "no worries."
- Explain what "bribes" and "threats" mean and that they are never acceptable. Here are some examples:
 - "I won't be your friend if you don't hold my hand."
 - "If you like me, then you will let me kiss you."
 - "I will give you something if you let me touch you."
- Unpack common scenarios that can happen in a student's life and how they factor into building a culture of consent.
 - Discuss other forms of pressure and manipulation, including guilt or frequent asking/begging for example:
 - "aw, come on, please ... everyone else is doing it";
 - "but we have been going out for so long";
 - "if you loved me you would";
 - "but it feels so much better without a condom"; and
 - emphasize that it is not okay to feel the need to agree to sexual activity in order to avoid the other person's stated anger or disappointment.

- What happens when students are at a party? How do they know if they or someone else has had too much to drink? What can students do to create safety for those who are intoxicated?
- People need to be aware of predators who will “spike” drinks and to be extremely vigilant about what they consume.
- Reinforce that consent can never be given if someone is intoxicated, incapacitated, asleep, or unconscious. Even if a person decided beforehand that they would engage in sexual activity, once they become in one of the above states, that person’s consent is revoked and cannot be obtained.
- Discuss the importance of advocating for people and to seek help if someone is being taken advantage of.
- Using a [trauma-informed](#) approach, roleplay a situation and practice ways they could advocate for someone who may have personal boundaries violated.
- Unpack examples of scenarios in popular culture and/or social media which contribute to the normalization of coercion and how the scenario could have unfolded differently if consent had been obtained.
- While talking about safe and unsafe touches, either consensual or nonconsensual, may seem like an elementary school topic, these issues remain relevant throughout a student’s life. Beyond more typical roughhousing and horseplay, people will do more sexually charged things like hit someone in the genitals or smack someone’s buttocks.
 - Often, people are not fully aware of the impact that these “games” can have. Encourage empathy and emphasize that setting boundaries is important. How would they feel if someone did these things to someone close to them?
 - Discuss personal boundaries with students: what are they, why are they important, how do boundaries keep us safe, how can we communicate boundaries (verbal and non-verbal), and how can we respect boundaries?
 - Remind students that these types of games are potentially assault or sexual harassment and that violating someone’s boundaries can have very serious consequences.
 - Examples of sexual harassment include: being touched, grabbed or pinched in a sexual way, sexual gestures, sexual jokes, being catcalled, insults with sexualized words, being the target of sexual rumours or of lewd or prolonged staring, unwanted sharing/display of pornography, requests/demands for sexual images/videos or being shown or sent sexual images/videos.
 - Addressing sexual harassment in the classroom and the school generally is also key to promoting a consent culture (and reducing sexual assault)
 - Even when students say they don’t mind and it’s just a game, power dynamics within peer groups mean that people who are being bullied would rather put up with abuse than be seen as having “tattled” on someone.
 - Have students brainstorm alternative outlets for these types of behaviours, such as intramural sports versus unstructured roughhousing.

- Encourage students to take action within the school related to building a culture of consent.
 - Students could discuss ways to educate themselves and their peers, such as a poster campaign, weekly announcements, inviting guest speakers, or other strategies.
- Ensure that students know that anyone who is being touched in an inappropriate manner is allowed to do whatever they need to do to get away.
 - Remind them that violence like this is usually not okay, but if it's a matter of protecting yourself, it is allowed and encouraged.
 - Emphasize that they will never be in trouble for protecting themselves from unsafe touch. The person doing or trying to do the touching is always in the wrong.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations.

- If a student discusses a relationship issue, such as abuse, in their own life, it's important to show that you believe them. Don't minimize their concerns.
- It is also important not to jump to conclusions, as the other person in the relationship may have a very different perspective. This is especially important if both people involved are students whom you may interact with.
- While students may want to discuss more ordinary relationship problems, if a student tells you about a relationship issue that seems abusive, be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure. (See General Suggestions for Teaching Health Topics.)
- Victims/ survivors of sexual assault may not directly disclose the event, but may demonstrate the following behaviours after experiencing a traumatic sexual incident:
 - compromised feelings of safety/well-being
 - heightened feelings of fear & hyper-vigilance
 - decrease/loss of confidence and low self-esteem
 - anxiety, depression, shame, guilt, and/or anger
 - difficulties concentrating
 - difficulties with memory
 - sleeping disorders or difficulty sleeping
 - suicidal ideation, self-mutilation and/or suicide attempts
 - alcoholism and/or drug abuse and/or other high-risk behaviours
 - symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder
 - and difficulties with emotional/intimate/sexual relationships

Topic: Internet Safety

Considerations

- It is hard to fully grasp the experiences that students are having online, as technology is ever-evolving, and new social media platforms are always coming in and out of popularity.
 - When in doubt, tell students to talk to their parents/guardians about the sites and platforms they are using.
 - Explain that you are suggesting this for their own safety, and that it is very important for their parents to understand exactly how they are using the Internet.
- Child predators can use online games and social media as a tool for grooming children and accessing personal information in bits and pieces over time through casual conversation.
 - To convey this to students, you can say something like “Most of the people on the Internet are not bad people. But just as there are dangerous people in the real world, there are also dangerous people online.”
 - Many students think they would be able to tell the difference between talking to a real child their own age and an adult pretending to be a child.
 - Ask them how they could tell.
 - Emphasize that the dangerous people online are smart and tricky, and they won't say, “Hi there, I'm a kid like you! Tell me your address!”

Note: *There is a fine line between informing students of potential dangers and scaring them, but it is important to:*

- *encourage all students to be very cautious while using online platforms and to be very open with their parents*
- *remind them that they will continue to have difficult and important decisions to make about how they use the Internet, because they will have more and more access to the Internet as they grow up*
- *encourage students to be aware of online bullying and hateful content - remind students to always practice online safety by being aware of the nature of possible threats and potentially harmful online situations*

- Ultimately, we cannot control what students do online; sometimes we can't even control what they are doing on school devices. Parent education is a very important piece of the puzzle.

- After having these conversations with your students, send some general information to parents about the kinds of apps and websites students listed as being popular, or features they have accessed.
- For example: “Today we discussed Internet safety as a class. Students said they play online games such as A, B, C; use apps such as D, E, F; and use features such as video chatting and photo sharing. Please talk to your child about Internet safety and the kinds of apps and games they are using. This would be a good time to do some research about the applications and the privacy laws surrounding them, and possibly to set up parental controls.”
- Allow students to ask questions about their experiences. Students may surprise you with their questions about making YouTube channels, befriending people they’ve never met, and sharing photos through platforms you’ve never even heard of.
- As teachers, you also need to be careful of your own social media profiles and what you share online. Students may search your social media profiles for potentially inappropriate activities you have talked about, or to look for pictures not intended for a student audience. Students finding information about you online is also a good opportunity to reinforce a culture of consent and how it’s important to respect boundaries and privacy. Sharing images or information to a person without permission is not a positive or caring behaviour in the school community.
- Remind students about the potential dangers of sharing information online, particularly if someone asks for pictures or personal information. Abusers can use pictures or personal information to blackmail people into doing things they don’t want to. Without fearmongering, reinforce that students should never share any intimate images with anyone.
 - Remind students that if an incident does happen, it is not their fault as the fault always lies with the person sharing their photo(s)/personal information without their consent. Students should report these incidents to a trusted adult.
- Also, reinforce that if a student ever does have access to an intimate image of someone else, sharing those is never acceptable and can be illegal. This can be introduced in an age-appropriate way by focusing on embarrassing information rather than sexual content. For example, sharing a picture of a friend doing something embarrassing might seem funny but can be extremely hurtful. These situations can lead to severe consequences for someone’s mental well-being.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering these topics with your students could include the following:

Catfishing

- Define catfishing for students: Catfishing is using a fictional online persona to deceive someone.

- Some people engage in catfishing to trick someone into giving them money or buying them things. For example, people have created a fake romantic partner and then tricked people into buying them gifts online.
- Some people will create a fake profile of a young person to lure someone into meeting face to face. While the student thinks they are meeting someone their age, they may be meeting an adult instead.
- Others catfish in order to avoid punishment when cyberbullying someone. Encourage students to be careful with people they add as friends, and not to have their social media accounts open to all people. Many social media apps and sites have filters that enable users to block messages from strangers, mute notifications, and otherwise filter out hostile messages from strangers.
- Still others catfish for blackmail purposes – for example, setting up a fake romantic interest and then getting someone to disclose personal information or send nude pictures. Once the catfisher has this material, they can then control the survivor/victim by threatening to send it to friends or family to embarrass them.
- Ask students if they think they could tell if they were being catfished, and if so how?
- Have the class brainstorm ways to avoid being catfished or to find out if they are being catfished.
 - Remind students that if something is too good to be true, it probably is. If an extremely attractive stranger randomly starts talking with them, they should be skeptical.
 - Many catfishers will use stock photos or other public images for their profile pictures. Students can use search engines like Google Image to see if a profile picture has been used by others.

Cyberbullying

- Define cyberbullying, and have students come up with examples of cyberbullying.
- Discuss what acts would be defined as cyberbullying and the consequences someone could face for cyberbullying.
- Provide statistics on the frequency of cyberbullying, how quickly it will stop when others intervene, the likelihood of male/female/LGBTQ+ bullying, and so on.
- Play a clip or clips of cyberbullying in a TV show and assign different roles/characters involved in the TV show to groups of students.
 - Have each group identify who is the target, bystander, upstander and offender.
 - Provide each group with specific reflective/ "why do you think"-type questions for each character.

Digital footprint

- Define digital footprint: the information about a particular person that exists on the Internet as a result of their online activity.

- Many employers and post-secondary institutions will do a digital data search on prospective employees/students. Think twice about what you post and how it will reflect on you as a person.
- Have students pull out their phones and find how long they have been on them that day. (They will also be able to tell how long they have used each app.)
 - Note: Not all phones track how long users have been on their phone. Most new phones do, but it depends on the make and model.
 - Remind students of the difference between “on screen” and “background” times. “On screen” time is the important one, as it represents the time the program was actually being used, rather than the time it was updating in the background.
- Show students how to turn the location feature on their phones *off* for photos. If the location feature is on, others can see that location for any picture that is posted, and then make educated guesses about more specific locations (such as which room in a house is a person's bedroom if they have posted images taken there).
- Remind students that cameras can be hacked. Suggest that they not leave their laptops open when not in use and/or to cover the camera/webcam with something (e.g., a sticker). People have been filmed unknowingly.
- Remind students that they should have passwords for their devices.
 - Passwords should not be shared with friends, and they shouldn't be easy to guess (e.g., 1234, or your address).

Legalities

- Before starting to discuss what is legal or illegal on the Internet, give students a questionnaire.
 - You can turn this into an activity by using True or False statements, having one side of the room be “True” and the other be “False,” and asking students to move to the side they think is correct. This will help you see which areas you need to focus your lesson on.
 - Have students complete the questionnaire again after you discuss legalities, so they can demonstrate their learning.
- Contact your local police department and ask if an officer can come in to talk about the legal aspects of cyberbullying and sending/receiving/possessing nude images, and about Internet safety in general.

Sexting/nudes

- Remind students that online photos are forever.
 - Even when you delete a photo, it is never truly gone. People can screenshot anything they find online. And the image still remains on the server.
 - The same applies to sending photos. Police can access social media site servers to find old photos and/or messages that have been sent, even if they seem to have been deleted.
 - A lot of the social media companies (e.g., Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook) have servers in the United States, which does not have the same privacy laws as we have in Canada.

- Emphasize that unsolicited sexual images should not be sent to people and that boundaries should be discussed and agreed-upon.

Non-Consensual Disclosure of Intimate Images

- Remind students that if you share a digital photo with someone, it can easily be shared with large numbers of people.
- If you send intimate images to a partner, it is possible they may share these images after the relationship ends. This is sometimes known as revenge porn, but many victims of non-consensual image sharing find this term to have victim-blaming connotations.
- Some people may also use the threat of disclosure to control someone. For example, an abusive partner may threaten to share intimate images with their partner's family, peers, or employer to control their behaviour.
- Under Canadian law, publishing intimate images of someone without their consent is considered a criminal offence.
- If convicted of the non-consensual disclosure of intimate images, someone may serve prison time and have their right to access the Internet restricted.

Topic: Healthy Relationships

Considerations

- It is important to recognize that there can be a wide range of different cultural norms regarding communication styles within relationships.
- Many healthy relationships may have attributes that may seem unhealthy to outsiders. For example, very close friends may tease and joke about each other as an important part of their friendship. As long as this type of relationship goes both ways and everyone is happy and still respects each other, it can still be a healthy relationship.
- Relationships change over time and friends can naturally drift apart. While this is normal, watch for students who appear to be isolated and ostracized, as they could be experiencing bullying.
- Not everyone in a classroom needs to be friends or like each other, but everyone needs to be respectful.
- For a variety of different reasons, students may wish to stay in what seems like an unhealthy relationship. While you can provide them with information or advice if requested, it is ultimately up to the student whether they want to continue in a relationship.
- Healthy relationships should be based on respect and students should understand the signs of an abusive relationship.
 - The most obvious sign of an unhealthy relationship is physical violence, such as slapping, punching, or kicking.

- However, a more common and difficult thing to identify is emotional abuse and control, such as intimidating, insulting, or humiliating their partner. This can also include controlling behaviours, like cutting someone off from friends and families, undermining their confidence, verbal abuse, or controlling access to things like a phone or bank account.
- An abusive relationship may include sexual violence, including violation of personal boundaries or forcing someone to engage in sexual activities. See Topic: Consent for more information.
- It is important to approach any disclosures of sexual assault or harassment not as isolated incidents, but rather acknowledge that such sexual violence takes place in a larger social context of misogyny and sexual discrimination.
 - **One in four girls and one in six boys** has been sexually abused by the time they are eighteen. One way of looking at these numbers is to imagine a classroom of twenty teenagers. Four or five girls and three or four boys in that class will have been sexually abused by the time they leave high school.
- Students should be taught that healthy relationships produce mostly positive energy and happiness (by mostly, we mean that all relationships will involve some disagreements and “hard times”), in contrast, abusive relationships are draining and often create feelings of anxiety and sometimes fear.
 - Students should also be aware that sexual assault can happen in relationships with people known to them and when consent is not provided. Meaning sexual assault is not just limited to situations involving someone they do not know.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering these topics with your students could include the following:

Communication

- Explain the importance of respectful communication in healthy relationships. Conflicts between people are often not due an actual disagreement but due to misunderstanding or poor communication.
- Show students the difference between how a message written in text is received and how the same message is received when read aloud, particularly if there are things like sarcasm or humour in the intended message.
 - Texts or emails are fine for grocery lists or telling someone where to meet you, but serious matters are usually best discussed face to face. Body language and tone of voice can make a huge difference in the way a message is received.
- Have students brainstorm the differences between good and bad communication and when different methods of communication are appropriate or inappropriate.
 - Elements of good communication could include honesty, being clear, discussing important things in person, being calm, asking questions, providing opportunities to respond, and being a good listener.

- Elements of bad communication could include being vague, dishonest, not listening to others, and getting upset for no reason.
- Reinforce a culture of consent and remind students that sharing information or secrets without permission is a violation of trust. Unless you are sharing a secret to protect someone (e.g., a friend talking about hurting themselves) you should always get permission before sharing information.

Abusive relationships

- Discuss the different kinds of abuse (cultural, financial, physical, psychological, sexual, verbal/emotional) with students.
- Talk about why people abuse others, such as for power and control.
- Brainstorm attributes that would be found in a healthy relationship and attributes that would be found in an abusive relationship.
 - If students are comfortable, have them give examples of what different kinds of abuse can look like.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- Define what gender-based violence is and the impacts it has disproportionately on certain groups (women and girls, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+ peoples and other diverse populations).
- Provide students examples and information on the types of assault, abuse and/or violence that occurs because of someone's gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender.
- Discuss with students the role of bystanders and what they can do in situations of GBV.
 - Discuss sources of information and support, such as law enforcement agencies, crisis and transition centres, crisis lines, and other advocacy organizations.
 - Abusers often try and isolate and emotionally control their victims and attempt to destroy their victim's self-esteem. People in a relationship experiencing gender-based violence need support and to know that they don't deserve what is happening to them.

Exploitation

- Explain what grooming and exploitation is and how it typically progresses slowly.
 - Most young people will trust their abuser, and/or they don't understand that they are being abused, and/or they are too scared to come forward.
- Discuss signs that a teen may present if they are being sexually abused or in an abusive relationship.
- Explain how exploitation can happen online. (See Internet Safety for more information.)
- Provide information about local resources for students if they think they are being exploited or if they know someone who is being exploited.

- Sextortion is when online predators convince a young person to take sexual photos or record sexual acts. They threaten to post the photos or videos online unless the person pays money or provides more inappropriate material. In most cases, young people get involved in this kind of situation because they think they're talking with another young person.

Respect

- Have students think of some examples of people they respect and reflect on why they respect those people.
- Have students brainstorm on what respect is and how people show respect and disrespect.
- Connect the previous conversations with how it feels to be respected or disrespected and how respect is paramount in a healthy relationship (romantic or otherwise).

Peer pressure

- Explain that some forms of peer influence are inevitable and are not always a bad thing.
 - For example, if one of your friends is enjoying a particular TV show, they may tell all their friends they need to watch it.
- Discuss differences between healthy peer influence and unhealthy peer pressure.
 - Healthy influences from peers are suggestions meant to benefit them (e.g., suggesting they all sign up for an activity together), where people can say no without judgment or consequences.
 - Unhealthy peer pressure involves things that could be unhealthy for them (e.g., pressure to take drugs or have sex), where saying no results in humiliation, ostracism, or even violence.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations:

- If a student discusses a relationship issue, such as abuse, in their own life, it's important to show that you believe them. Don't minimize their concerns.
- It is also important not to jump to conclusions, as the people in the relationship may have very different perspectives. This is especially important if both people involved are students whom you may interact with.
- While students may want to discuss more ordinary relationship problems, if a student tells you about a relationship issue that seems abusive, be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure. (See General Suggestions for Teaching Health Topics.)

Resources to Consider

For information to help educators feel informed, confident in their knowledge and understand the criminal law components regarding sexual assault and abuse, the following resources are recommended:

- [Legislation & Policy Related to Victims in the Criminal Justice System - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)
- [Crime Examples - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)
- [Help starts here - Sexual Assault \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

Topic: Healthy Sexual Decision Making

Considerations

- Don't impose your beliefs or values on the topics covered.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering these topics with your students could include the following:

- Abortion and contraception
- Review how different contraceptive options are used and how they work.
- Provide information about local resources where students can go to get more information, help, and/or contraceptive devices.
 - Try to provide as much detail as possible: For example, which contraceptive devices are available? What services are provided? Are they free? Where is it located? What are its hours? How can students get there? (Provide walking and bus routes, as many students don't drive.)

Legalities

- Age difference is determined by birthday, month, and year. So if a 12-year-old is dating someone who is two years and one day older than them, it would be illegal for them to engage in sexual activity.
- Consent can never be given if someone is intoxicated, incapacitated, asleep, or unconscious. Even if a person said beforehand that they would engage in sexual activity, if they are intoxicated, they may not be able to consent and the sexual activity should not proceed.

Sexually transmitted infections

- Note: Graphic photos are unnecessary.

- Discuss the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine and how vaccination can protect both males and females from several types of cancer.
- Explain which STIs are bacterial and which are viral.
- Explain that a person who has HIV is legally obligated to tell all sexual partners before they engage in any sexual activity.
- Discuss the different types of tests that students who are sexually active should be getting, emphasizing that these tests are not a “one and done” situation.
 - Encourage students to get tested regularly. In B.C., all STI testing is free, and all testing facilities are required to maintain confidentiality (e.g., not tell parents).
- Provide information about local resources where students can go for testing and/or treatment.
 - Try to provide as much detail as possible: What services are provided? Are they free? Where is the resource located? What are its hours? How can students get there? (Provide walking and bus routes, as many students don’t drive.)

Pornography

- Sexual health experts/educators have stated that if parents and educators are not teaching children and youth about sex and sexuality, then those children and youth will learn about those topics elsewhere, and this is increasingly via the internet and pornography.
- Discuss the underlying messages that can be found in pornography, including violence, inequality between men and women, and lack of consent.
 - Adolescent exposure to pornography fosters unhealthy ideas about human sexuality – such as acceptance of sexual coercion and the normalization of teenage sexual aggression.
 - The rise of pornography (and particularly violent pornography) by children and youth at increasingly younger ages (intentionally or unintentionally) complicates the sexual landscape for our students.
- Tell students that a lot of what can be found on the Internet is photoshopped, unsafe, violent, and/or completely fabricated.
- Remind students that once you see something, you can’t un-see it. They need to be careful when they search for information.
 - Talk about the difference between reliable and unreliable websites. Students need to be mindful of where they are getting their information from.
- Be clear that having explicit images or videos of people who are under age 18 can be considered as possession of child pornography, and sending explicit images or videos of anyone under age 18 can be considered as distribution of child pornography. Both are illegal and can result in severe and long-lasting consequences.

Topic: Safer Sex (Including STIs)

Considerations

- Remind students that sex, in all its varieties, should always be consensual for both people.
 - Remind students what consent looks/sounds/feels like (See Topic: Consent.) as well as what is safe and unsafe touching.
- Don't impose your beliefs and values on the topics covered (e.g., people must be married to have sex).
- Use the term "STI" (sexually transmitted infection) not "STD" (sexually transmitted disease). Most STIs are curable infections, not diseases. The word "disease" has a negative connotation, suggesting that it is stuck with the person. STIs are either viral or bacterial.
- Graphic images are often used as a scare tactic for STI prevention. This is both unnecessary and potentially traumatic for some people.
- Have clinic information readily available so students can access information and health services.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering this topic with your students could include the following:

- Discuss different options to use to prevent pregnancy (except for condoms, these do not prevent STIs):
 - IUD (hormonal and copper)
 - Contraceptive pill
 - Vaginal ring
 - Injection
 - Hormonal patch
 - Condoms (male and female)
- Discuss emergency contraception after unprotected sex:
 - Two options: IUD or emergency contraceptive pills (including the varieties available)
 - There is no need to go to the doctor for pill option, as it is available at most pharmacies/clinics.
- Discuss why condoms are good protection against both an STI and an unwanted pregnancy.
 - Condoms are one-use only and come in different varieties.

- While condoms provide good protection against an unplanned pregnancy, combining condom use with other contraception provides even better protection in case of accidents (e.g., a condom used improperly or breaking).
- Explain that while the use of contraceptives can significantly reduce the chances of unplanned pregnancies, the only guaranteed way to prevent pregnancy and the spread of STIs is not having sex.
- Tell students that as soon as they are sexually active, they should be getting regular testing for STIs, including testing for HIV (this is a blood test).
 - Some STIs don't cause symptoms. Or they cause symptoms that then go away. This is why it is important to get checked regularly.
 - STI testing is free in B.C.
 - Testing using involves a medical professional taking a sample of body fluid from the throat, inside the tip of the penis, or inside the rectum or vagina. Urinating into a medical cup and a blood test can also be parts of an STI test.
 - Testing and results are completely anonymous and confidential. Parents/guardians will not be given the information.
 - If a test shows a syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, or HIV infection (communicable diseases that are tracked by the BC Centre for Disease Control), the local health authority will offer three options:
 1. You tell your most recent partner(s) about your test results and suggest that they get tested.
 2. You book an appointment to speak to the medical professional with your most recent partner(s).
 3. Either the health care provider or a public health nurse will contact your most recent partner(s) and tell them they have been exposed to an STI and that they need to get tested. Your name will not be mentioned.
- For the most part, treating an STI is as simple as treating an infection like strep throat. You would go to a doctor to get treatment for strep throat, and STIs are the same.
 - This is a good opportunity to talk about the dangers of stigma preventing people from getting the treatment they need.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations:

- If you have a Q&A session during the lesson, students may try and “throw you off” with a comment/question.
 - Provide the class with an anonymous “Question Box” and ask them to write questions **or** one thing they learned that day, without writing their names. Since

everyone will be writing something, students will feel safe to ask. If possible, keep the Question Box available so that students can ask any questions that arise later.

- Remember that you can always revisit a topic at a later date if you discover a better way to answer a question.
- Provide students with specific instructions for accessing resources and support. For example, contact local health authorities to get current phone numbers and websites for resources, or show students how to get to the closest resources on foot, by bus, and so on.

Resources to Consider

The following resource links provided below are to assist educators in accessing clinical information that is the most current, accurate, and credible. All information comes from HealthLink BC – a government funded telehealth service.

- [Safer Sex | HealthLink BC](#)
- [Sexually Transmitted Infections | HealthLink BC](#)
- [Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STIs\) | HealthLink BC](#)

For questions and/or information on the types of STIs and their prevalence in BC for certain ages of students, it is recommended educators use the [BCCDC Reportable Diseases Dashboard](#).

For information on how to access free STI testing:

- [Clinics & Testing | SmartSex Resource](#)
- [GetCheckedOnline \(bccdc.ca\)](#)

Supporting Student Health: Mental Health

Notes on language

- Introduce all aspects of health: mental, physical, social, sexual. Make the connection between *physical* health and *mental* health.
- Suggest to students that taking care of their mental health is just as important as taking care of their physical health because the two things work together.
 - Use this opportunity to discuss stigma as it relates to mental illness. For example, people aren't embarrassed to seek help from a doctor when their leg is broken; but if someone thinks



they will be judged for struggling with anxiety or depression, it's like walking on a broken leg because they are embarrassed to seek the help they need to recover.

- Remember to model the use of appropriate language in your classroom and encourage students to do the same. For example, using words and expressions like “crazy,” “just get over it,” or “don’t be so sensitive” can be hurtful and perpetuate stereotypes.
- Clarify the differences between chronic mental health issues and day-to-day stressors.
 - Discourage students from casually using expressions like “I’m so depressed – I didn’t get to see the movie I wanted” or “I was so bored – I wanted to die.” Remind students that this can be very hurtful for people who truly struggle with those feelings.
- Students can express themselves in many different ways. Be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure in relation to potential issues like student self-harm. If you have concerns about a student, speak to your school counsellor.

Daily classroom practices

- Create a safe and welcoming learning space.
- Use a Social Emotional Learning framework in your class. Try to create a sense of belonging and mutual respect among your students.
- Focus on strengths.
 - Since adolescents are striving for independence, a focus on strengths resonates with them because it inspires empowerment and agency in relation to health.
 - There is plenty of research that points to the importance of focusing on mental health, as opposed to mental illness, to enhance psychosocial strengths, competencies, and ability to access resources. A narrow focus on mental illness isn’t enough. Students need to develop strategies for coping with adversity, and to increase their awareness and use of resources
- Don’t underestimate the power of physical activity. Incorporate strategies such as various breathing techniques into your daily classroom practice. Take brain breaks. Move desks aside and do some movement, if possible. Allow students to self-regulate and get fresh air or exercise as needed.

- *Counsellors play an important role in supporting students’ mental well-being in a one-to-one setting. But collaborating with counsellors and having them do lessons with the whole class can also be hugely beneficial for students. Talk to the school counsellor about co-teaching – specifically about strategies for coping with difficulty.*
- *All students may need to use these strategies to cope in times of difficulty.*
- *When all students learn these strategies, they may be more likely to know the signs of distress, ask for support when they need it, and support one another.*

Follow-up

- If you are unsure about whether to refer a student to a school counsellor, talk to the counsellor.
- Provide students with specific instructions for accessing resources and support. For example, contact local health authorities to get current phone numbers and websites for resources, or show students how to get to the closest resources on foot, by bus, and so on.

Topic: Body Image

Considerations

- Body image is the mental picture that people have about their body. This includes both how they perceive their own body and how they think other people view their body.
- Most people have things about their own bodies that they might like to change. Not being completely happy with aspects of your body is perfectly natural and not necessarily unhealthy.
- Unhealthy body image can be caused by pressure to meet perceived societal expectations or pressure related to participation in activities. For example, people involved in sports can feel pressure to stay very thin or muscular.
 - While it may seem unhealthy to others, being involved in competitive sports may require people to commit to a strict diet and training regimen.
- Body image can be unhealthy when there is a large gap between someone's self-perception and reality.
 - For example, students may look thin to others but see themselves as overweight, potentially leading to eating disorders.
- Gender identity can also influence body image. Some people may feel pressure to conform to societal expectations related to masculine or feminine characteristics.
- While it is important to help students feel comfortable in their bodies, they also should not be discouraged from having a healthy diet and exercising.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering this topic with your students could include the following:

- Discuss body image and have students brainstorm about what they think body image represents.
- Talk about the role that the media plays in shaping body image.
 - Remind students that many of the photos we see have been airbrushed and photoshopped. You can tie this in with the modelling industry and how new

laws require companies to state that an image has been airbrushed or photoshopped.

- Talk about the unhealthy ways in which people alter their bodies (e.g., steroid use, eating disorders) and the potential consequences associated with them.
- Have students select and analyze an advertisement (e.g., magazine, TV, Internet) and then write a reflection on the advertisement, responding to questions that you have provided. Here are some examples:
 - What catches your eye about this advertisement?
 - What is being advertised?
 - Who is the target audience for this advertisement?
 - Who is being represented in the advertisement?
 - What feelings are you left with after seeing this advertisement? Do you feel that you need to change anything about yourself?
- Discuss healthy and unhealthy ways to change aspects of appearance. For example:
 - Healthy: diet, exercise, changing hair colour
 - Unhealthy: starving yourself, taking diet pills, using steroids

Topic: Stress

Considerations

- It's important for both teachers and students to remember that being in good mental health can include experiencing stress.
- Experiencing momentary stress is a natural response to day-to-day challenges, and overcoming it helps students grow.
 - For example, it is totally normal to experience stress before a job interview or because you forgot to do something you promised your friend you would do.
 - These types of stress can be identified and managed with a variety of coping strategies.
- While day-to-day stress can often be predicted and overcome with a variety of strategies, students may also experience stress from more serious and long-term sources, such as parents going through a divorce or the death of a loved one.
 - When experiencing serious, long-term stress, students may need additional support.
 - Unlike many day-to-day sources of stress, these more serious, long-term stressors are usually out of the student's control.
 - Experiencing stress during a difficult time is natural, and students often just need time (e.g., taking time to grieve a relative who has died).

- While stress is a normal response to challenging situations, experiencing chronic stress can lead to serious health problems. It is important for students to seek medical help if they are experiencing high levels of stress for long periods of time, particularly if the stress isn't related to a difficult situation in their lives.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Make a class list of stressors. Sometimes students are relieved to see that others are dealing with the same stressors.
 - As a class, rank the stressors. (This will definitely lead to debate and conversation.)
 - Have students follow up by writing an "exit slip" in which they personally reflect on the list of stressors and their ranking.
 - Students may also use this opportunity to identify sources of stress they were not comfortable discussing with the group.
- Have students create posters featuring tips for reducing stress, to put around the school.
- Have the students create vision boards and present them to each other in small groups.
 - Setting short-term and long-term SMART (specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, timely) goals can be a good stress-management technique.
- Discuss the importance of being there for a friend who needs support.
 - People experiencing stress may be sad or angry and may even say or do things that are hurtful, but often just listening and showing you care can help someone during a difficult time.
 - While helping your friend through a difficult time is important, make sure you are also getting support from friends and family.
 - If a friend ever talks about harming themselves or others, or talks about suicide, tell a trusted adult as soon as possible. Even if you promised not to tell anyone, your friend needs help immediately.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations.

- If, during a lesson on mental health, a student shares that a family member is depressed:
 - Show empathy.
 - Remind students that this is one of the reasons why we talk about mental health, so that we can ask for help when we need it, and support our friends and family when they need it.

- Remind students that mental illness is very common, but not something that a lot of people talk about.
- Remind students that we should also respect the privacy of people who have mental illnesses.
- Students can express themselves in many different ways. Be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure in relation to student self-harm. If you have concerns about a student, speak to your school counsellor.

Topic: Stigma

Considerations

- Stigma around mental health can prevent people from seeking help, so this should be your starting point *before* discussing specific issues.
- Many students don't know what the word "stigma" means, so it needs to be explicitly defined.
 - Stigma is when someone views another person in a negative way based on their circumstances, characteristics, or traits.
 - Stigma is a negative stereotype.
- The lives of people with mental health issues are often plagued by stigma (both social stigma and self-stigma), discrimination, and shame.
- Mental illness is the same as physical illness. If someone breaks their leg, they don't hesitate to see a doctor. However, someone with a mental illness might avoid seeing a doctor because they worry that they'll be judged.
 - There is a mistaken belief that you should be able to control your mental health. An example of this is when people say "just stop worrying so much" to someone who has an anxiety disorder or is experiencing stress.
- Media portrayals of mental illnesses are often highly inaccurate.
 - People with mental health conditions are often depicted as dangerous, violent, and unpredictable.
 - Depression can be portrayed as a choice or a sign of weakness.
- Stigma-Free Society is a B.C. organization that can provide guest speakers who will visit your class in person or remotely to discuss mental health topics.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in exploring this topic with your students could include the following:

- Many famous celebrities have overcome mental health challenges and talk publicly to help break down stigmas and inspire others to get help or overcome similar challenges.

- Have students research a celebrity of their choice who has struggled with mental health.
- What are their stories? How did they overcome their challenges?
 - Have students develop a public awareness campaign, creating public service announcements (PSAs; – e.g., video, websites, or posters to put up around the school) that address some sort of stigma or negative stereotype related to mental health.
 - Have students discuss examples of health-related stigmas from the past that have changed, such as stigmas around HIV/AIDS or PTSD.
 - Why has public understanding of these issues changed, while other stigmas have remained?
 - Have students research a variety of mental health myths and present their findings to the class. For example:
 - Mental illness is “in your head” and you should be able to fix it on your own.
 - People with mental illnesses are violent or delusional (e.g., hear voices).
 - People with mental illnesses need to take powerful medications.

Topic: Coping Strategies

Considerations

- As they go through puberty, students undergo a number of major physical, emotional, and social changes. Difficult situations in their lives can leave students feeling overwhelmed and cause them to experience high levels of stress.
- Each student will respond to stress in different ways. Some students may become quiet and withdrawn, and others may display disruptive behaviours such as arguing or having angry outbursts.
 - While some of these behaviours may be difficult to deal with, responding as calmly and positively as possible will make it easier to help students deal with their stress more productively.
 - If you notice new or unusual behaviours in a student, it is important not to overreact. Most of the stressors that students experience are temporary and do not lead to chronically high levels of stress.
- Focus on strengths.
 - Since adolescents are striving for independence, a focus on strengths resonates with them because it inspires empowerment and agency in relation to health.
 - There is plenty of research that points to the importance of focusing on mental health, as opposed to mental illness, to enhance psychosocial strengths, competencies, and ability to access resources. A narrow focus on mental illness isn't enough.

- Familiarize yourself with some of the ground-breaking discoveries made about the brain, especially about the positive influence of physical activity on both brain health and mental health, so you can make students aware of the benefits of physical activity for mental health.
- While these strategies can help many people, severe mental health issues are not a failure to properly use coping strategies. Some problems can be handled on our own but others may need outside help, such as counselling, therapy, or medication.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering this topic with your students could include the following:

- Explain that people can improve both their physical and mental health through practice.
 - Just as we can get stronger by lifting weights, so can we reduce our stress levels by using the right coping strategies.
- Brainstorm a number of healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with stress. For example:
 - Healthy: being physically active, being outdoors, meditating, using various breathing techniques, doing yoga, getting a massage, spending time with pets, turning to family and friends for support, service learning, watching comedy, journalling, crafting, drawing and colouring, cooking, sleeping
 - Unhealthy: using drugs and alcohol, burying yourself in work, cutting yourself off from friends, bingeing (over-eating, over-exercising, binge drinking)
- Research coping strategies as a class and have students try one or more of them.
 - For example: box breathing (also known as square breathing), meditation, mindfulness, yoga, spending time outdoors, journalling, drawing and colouring, visualization, working out
 - Explain that everyone is different and that different strategies may work for one student but not another.
 - Have students discuss which activities they think they might use again.
 - Have students write a short reflection on an exit slip about their favourite coping strategies.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions.

- Students can express themselves in many different ways. Be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure about student self-harm. If you have concerns about a student, speak to your school counsellor.

Resources

- BC Crisis Centre: 1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE), www.crisiscentre.bc.ca/ – available 24/7/365

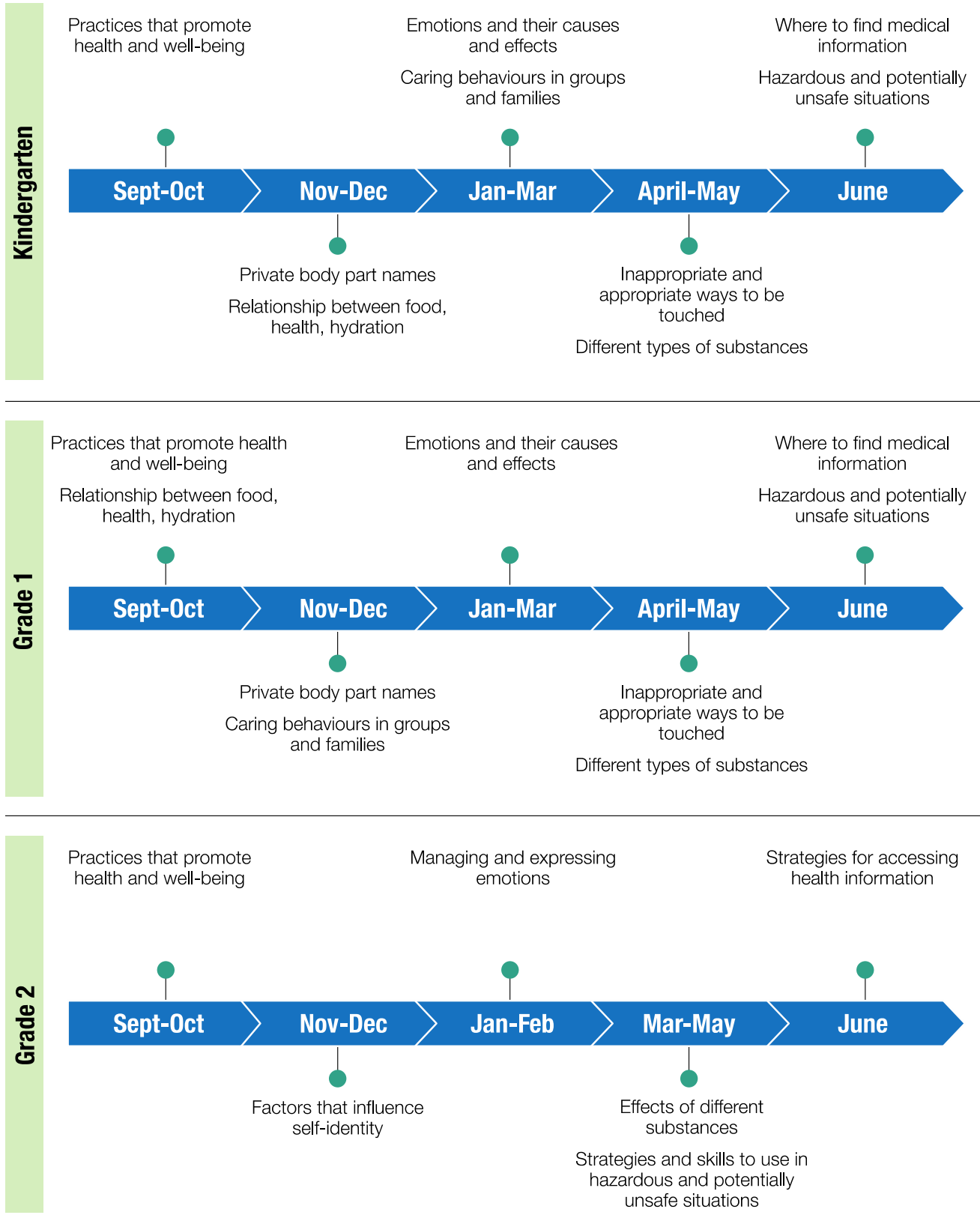
- Bullying Canada: 1-877-352-4497 – available 24/7/365
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 – available 24/7/365
- Kids Help Phone texting service: text CONNECT to 686868 – available 24/7/365
- HealthLink BC: [HealthLink BC - 24/7 Health Advice You Can Trust](#)
 - [About 8-1-1 | HealthLink BC](#)
- Options for Sexual Health: <https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/>
- Youth Against Violence: 1-800-680-4264, info@youthagainstviolenceline.com – available 24/7/365 in multiple languages; resources available for teachers
- Youth in BC Online Chat: www.youthinbc.com/ – available 12 p.m.–1 a.m.
- Youth Space Text Line: 1-778-783-0177, www.youthspace.ca/ – online chat available 6 p.m.–12 a.m. PT

Information about reporting child abuse can be found at:

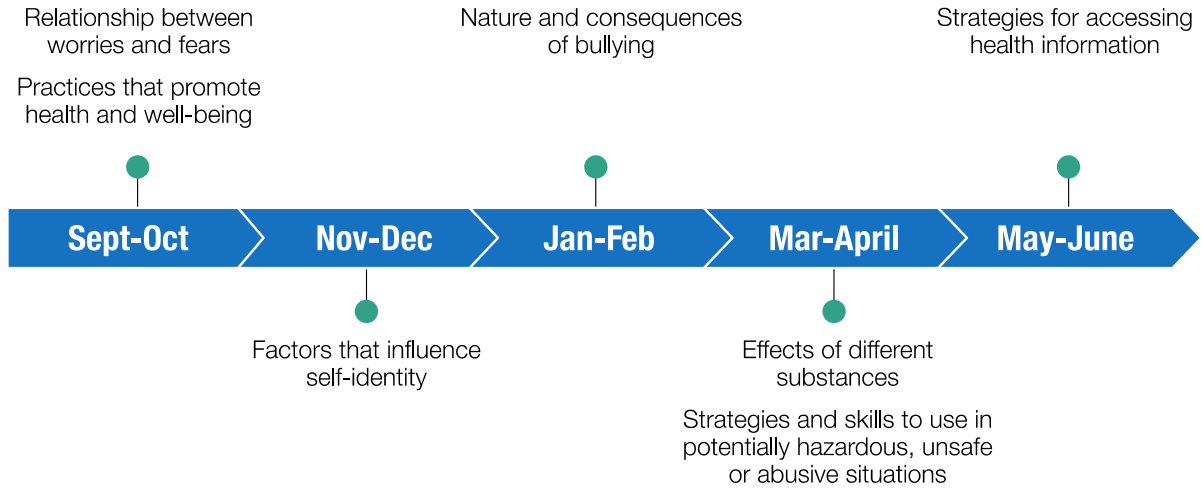
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse>

To report child abuse and neglect in B.C., call 1-800-663-9122.

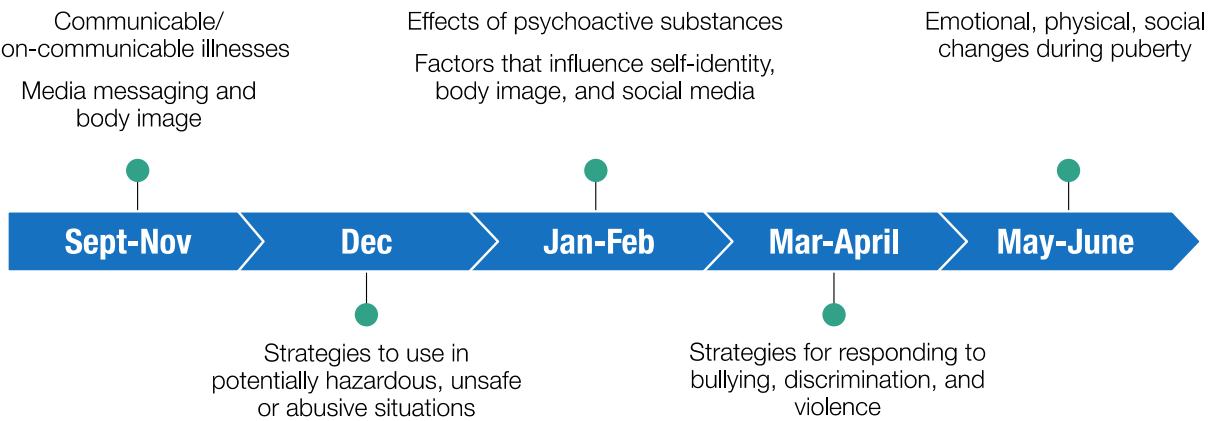
K-Grade 10 Suggested Topics



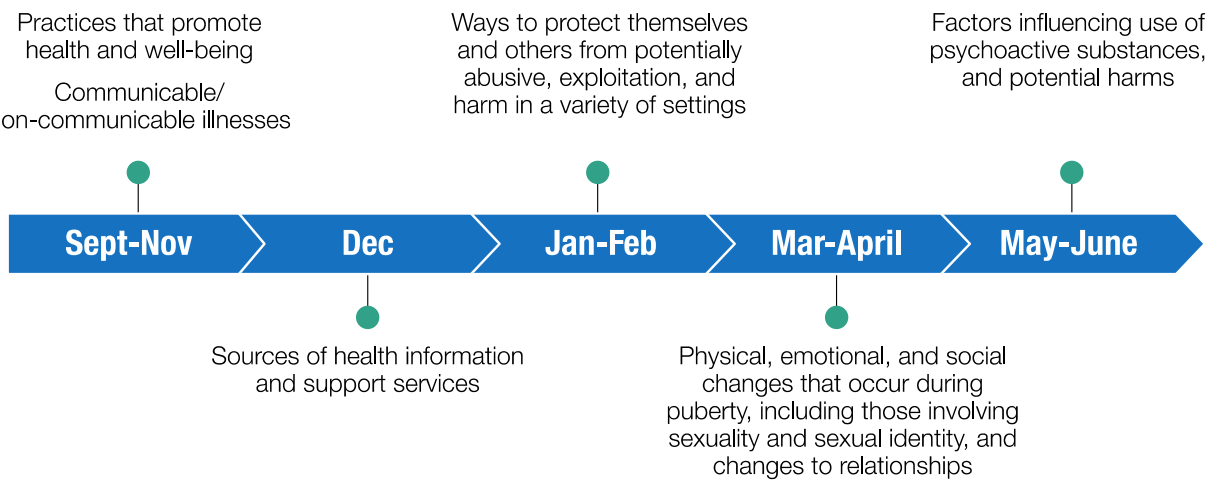
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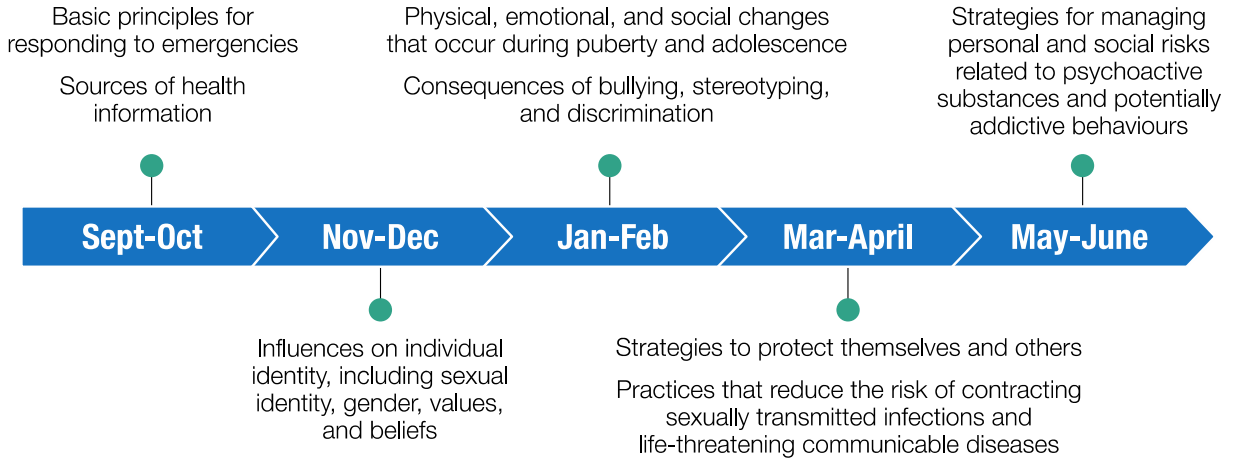
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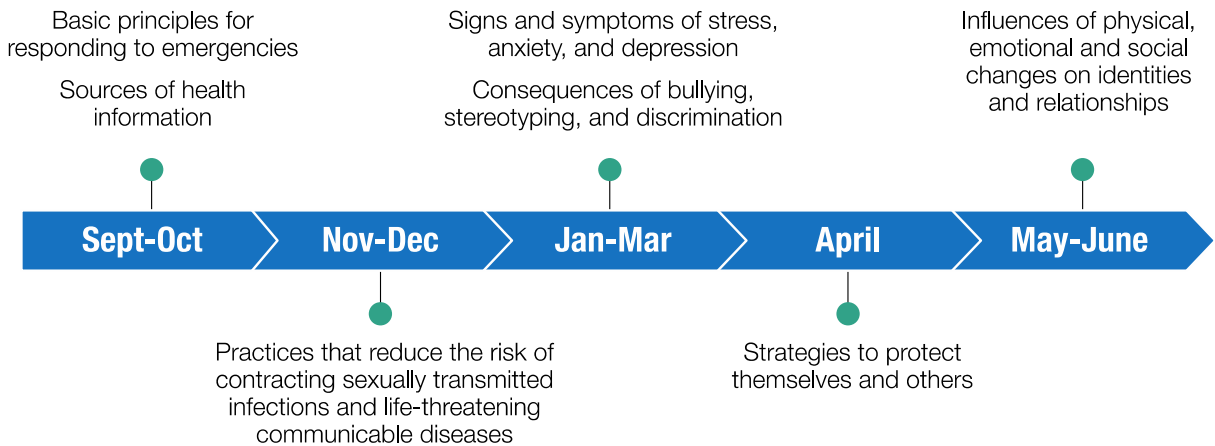
Grade 5



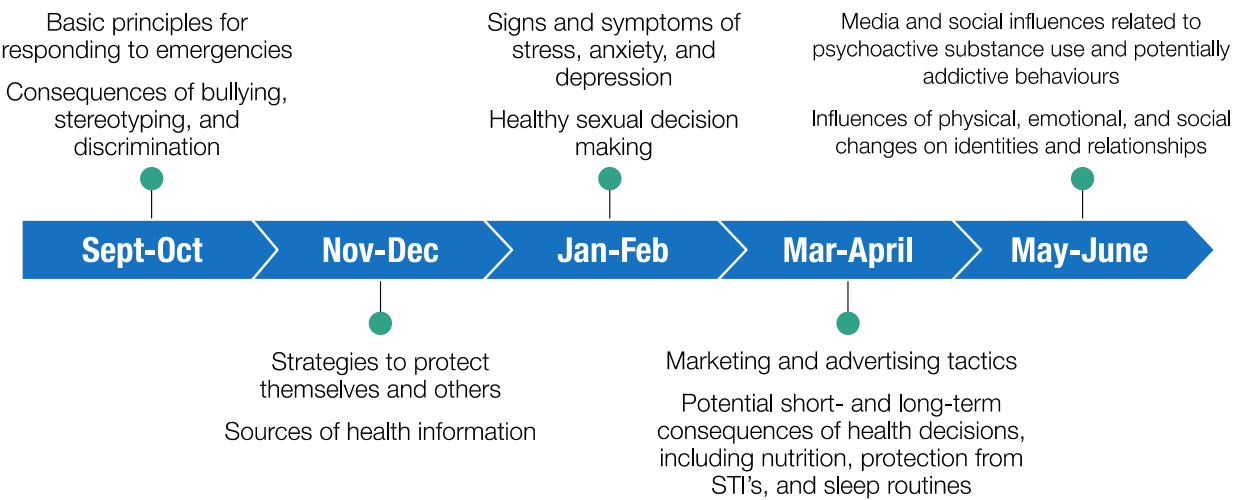
Grade 6



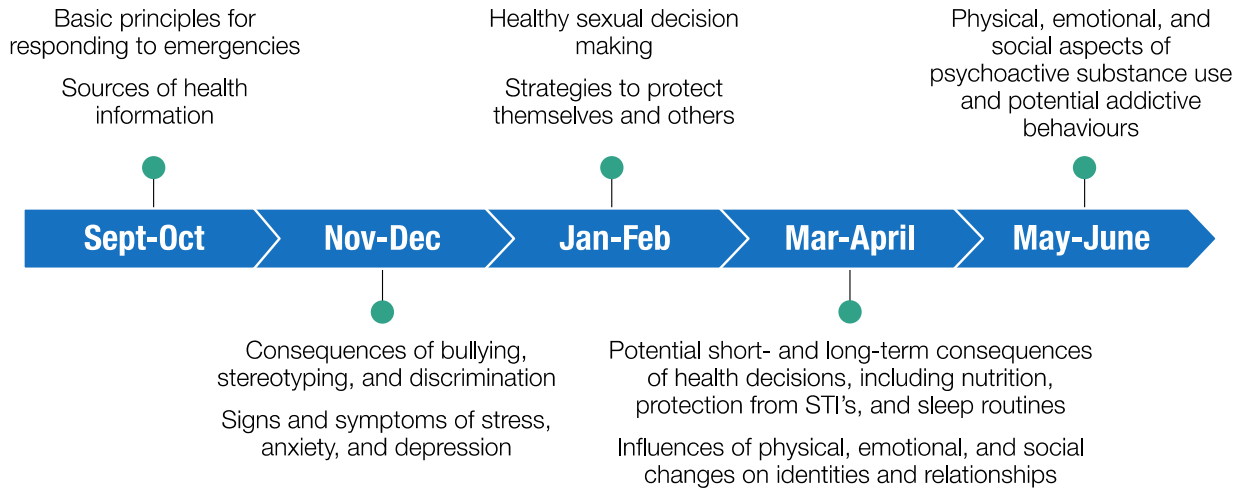
Grade 7



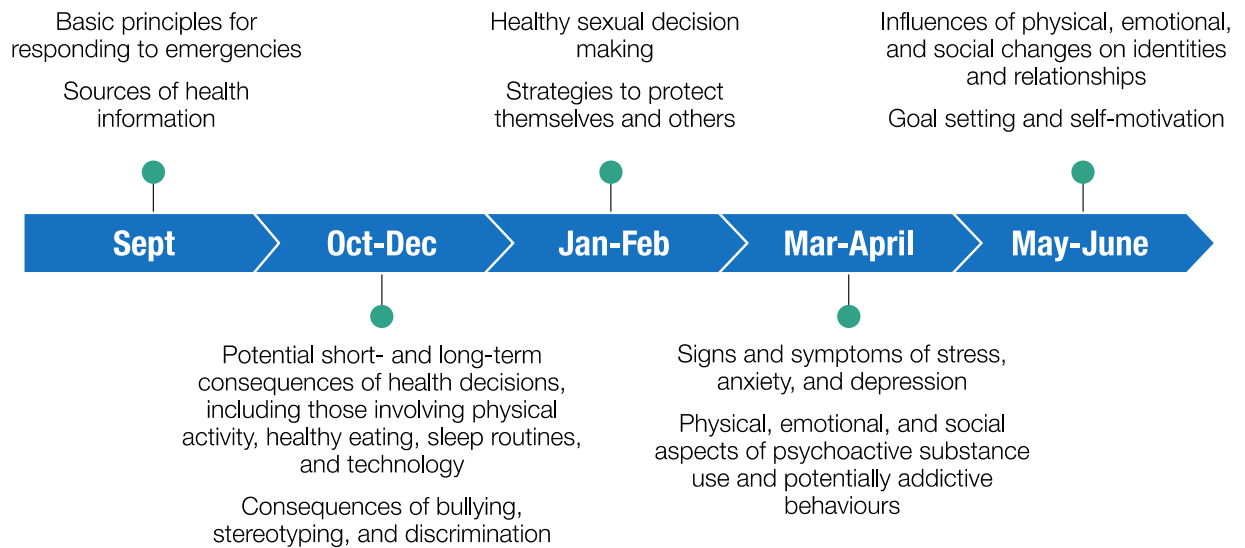
Grade 8



Grade 9



Grade 10



Sample Letter to Send Home

To parents/guardians,

Sexual and mental health is part of the PHE (Physical and Health Education) curriculum. When people know information about their body, they are empowered to make healthy decisions. As our province has moved to a more holistic approach to health, knowing how our bodies and minds develop is vital to children keeping themselves healthy and safe.

Students will be learning about their bodies as they develop both physically and emotionally. This learning will take place in a safe space. Throughout the year, students will be learning a variety of topics. Please see below for a rough guideline for the years learning. All information shared will be from the Grade (X) curriculum, which you can view online at:

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/physical-health-education>

September – October: (list topics to be covered)

(continue for the rest of the year)...

If you have questions about any of the topics covered in Health, I would be happy to discuss this further.

I look forward to all the learning we will be doing together this year.

Alternative Delivery Policy

In British Columbia, the Alternative Delivery Policy gives parents the ability to teach health topics from the Physical and Health Education curriculum at home. However, it is important to note that this does not exempt students from learning about these topics. Parents must work with their school so that their children meet these learning standards at home and a student must be able to demonstrate their understanding of these topics.

While there are no provincial guidelines regarding how parents are notified about upcoming topics, it is recommended that parents receive enough notice about topics to give them an opportunity to contact you regarding specific topics of concern. This gives you opportunities to work through potential areas of concern rather than simply remove their children from these lessons.

More detailed information about the Alternative Delivery Policy is available online at:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/alternative-delivery-in-the-physical-and-health-curriculum>

Glossary of Key Terms:

Abuse	Covers a number of types of abuse, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, emotional harm, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. (BC Government Website)
Anxiety	Emotional issues relating to temporary or ongoing highs (being manic) or lows (feelings of despair). These highs or lows may cause withdrawal from regular social or work activities. (BC Government Website)
Bodily Autonomy	<i>A person's right to make decisions regarding their own body, including deciding at any point who may or may not touch their body.</i> (Adapted from Creating Consent Culture)
Body Image	Body image refers to the range of thoughts and feelings about your body. They can include thoughts of acceptance and thoughts or actions that may be problematic to personal health and well-being. (Adapted from Ministry of Health)
Bullying	Intentional, hurtful and aggressive behaviour that makes others feel uncomfortable, scared or upset. (BC Government Website)
Consent	An agreement to engage in an activity and occurs when you ask, or give, permission to do something. It is used and should be used within daily life interactions and/or activities – such as asking for food or drink, taking a picture and/or posting it on social media, physical touch, or participating in an activity. (BC Government Website)
Culture of Consent	<i>"A community in which common ground and respecting boundaries is the norm, for both sexual contact and everyday activities.</i> (Adapted from Creating Consent Culture)
Cyberbullying	Teasing or humiliating a person online using social media, cruel websites, video games, chat rooms, instant message or texting. Cyberbullying is constantly evolving and changing with new technology and social media sites and can happen at any time of day or night, reaching a person even in the privacy or their own home. (BC Government Website)
Depression	A type of mood disorder. It can change the way you feel and act and can also affect your ability to function in your daily life. It has both mental and physical symptoms different from typical feelings of sadness or grief. (BC Government Website – Wellbeing)
Digital Footprint	Personal activities on the internet that leave a permanent trail. (Adapted from BC's Digital Literacy Framework)
Grooming	When someone acts like your friend, girlfriend, or boyfriend, to try and make you do things like talk about sex or send videos or images of yourself without your clothes on. Sometimes takes place over a long period of time, over multiple conversations and can put you into a harmful situation. (Federal Government Website)

	Online Grooming – when someone becomes friends with a minor online in order to control and take advantage of them for a sexual purpose, whether online or in-person. (Federal Government Website)
Gender	A social identity, such as man, woman, non-binary or two-spirit. (Federal Government Website)
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Violence that is committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender. It can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature. GBV disproportionately impacts women and girls, Indigenous peoples, and other diverse populations. (BC Government Website)
Gender Equity	About removing barriers that stop people from reaching their full potential. Too often, women and gender diverse people experience unfairness. This is especially true when they also struggle with injustices like poverty, racism, ableism and/or homophobia. (BC Government Website)
Harassment	Comes in many forms and it can be criminal. Criminal harassment includes repeatedly communicating with someone or engaging in threatening behaviour that makes that person fear for their safety or the safety of a family member. You might experience harassment by people in the community of by the accused or offender. (BC Government Website)
Gender Inclusive Language	Language that’s free from prejudice, stereotypes or discriminatory views of specific people or group. (BC Government Website)
Medical Professional/ Practitioner	A member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia who is entitled to practice under the <i>Health Professions Act</i> . (BC Government Website – Definitions)
Neglect	Failure to provide for a child’s or youth’s basic needs. It involved an act of omission by the parent or guardian, resulting in harm to the child or youth. Neglect may include: failure to provide food, shelter, basic health care, supervision or protection from risks. (BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect)
‘No’ Feeling	An instinctual feeling to decline/ say ‘no’ to and/or remove yourself from a dangerous or uncomfortable situation.
Non-Consensual Disclosure of Intimate Images	The non-consensual distribution of intimate images (including videos) that can occur in various situations involving adults and youth, including relationship breakdown and cyberbullying. Intimate photos taken and shared during the relationship between partners are then distributed or shared to the partners family, friends, employers etc. or posted online when the relationship breaks down. (Adapted from Canadian Department of Justice)
Peer Pressure	Being influenced and choosing to do something you wouldn’t otherwise do, in the hope of feeling accepted and valued by others. It isn’t just about doing something against your will. (BC Gov Website - HealthLinkBC)
Perpetrator/ Offender	A person who commits an offence of crime/ A person who has been determined by a court to be guilty of an offence, whether on

	acceptance of a plea of guilty or on a finding of guilt. In an informal context it can also refer to a person who is suspected of committing a crime. (Courts of BC – Justice Education Society)
Physical Abuse	The deliberate physical assault or action by a person that results in, or is likely to result in, physical harm to a child or youth – including the use of unreasonable force to discipline a child or youth, or to prevent a child or youth from harming themselves. (BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect)
Power Dynamic	The way different people or different groups of people interact with each other, such as how one person leverages their power over another. (Adapted from Creating Consent Culture)
Sex	Biological characteristics, such as male, female or intersex. (Federal Government Website)
Sexting/ Nudes	Creating, sending or sharing intimate or sexual messages, images, or videos with friends, people you know or even strangers online or through a connected device. It could be sending naked pictures of yourself or others, sharing a video of someone naked or having sex, or sending a text describing sexual acts. (Federal Government Website)
Sextortion	Simply put, sextortion is blackmail. It's when someone threatens to send a sexual image or video of you to friends, family or other people if you don't provide more sexual images or videos or do what they ask. (Federal Government Website)
Sexual Abuse	When a child or youth is used (or likely to be used) for the sexual gratification of another person. (BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect)
Sexual Assault	Any sexual contact that happens without consent of both people. It can range from unwanted sexual touching to forced sexual intercourse. It can occur anywhere – in your home, at a community facility like a recreational centre or in public places. It can occur even when people who know each other or are married or dating. Sexual assault occurs when someone did not consent to the sexual activity. (BC Government Website)
Sexual Exploitation	A form of sexual abuse that occurs when a child or youth engages in a sexual activity, usually through manipulation or coercion, in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter or other considerations. (BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect)
Sexual Harassment	Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. It is sexual harassment if someone repeatedly says or does things to you that are insulting and offensive. It can be words or actions that are sex or gender-related. (Human Rights in BC – Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment)
Sexual Orientation	Your pattern of emotional, romantic or sexual attraction – May include attraction to the same gender (homosexuality), a gender different than your own (heterosexuality), both men and women (bisexuality), all genders (pansexual), or neither (asexuality). (BC Government Website – HealthLinkBC)

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STIs)	Affect the general health, well-being and reproductive capacity of those infected. Participation in sexual risk behaviours can increase your chances of acquiring an STI. The most common types of STIs include chlamydia, genital herpes, gonorrhoea, HIV/AIDS, human papillomavirus (HPV), lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV), and syphilis. (Federal Government Website)
Stigma	Disapproval of a person or group by society, community or larger group, based on perceived characteristics, which significantly discredits the person or group in the eyes of others, particularly when the person or group differs from the larger cultural norms. (BC Government Overdose Prevention and Response Glossary)
Stress	How your body reacts to any change or challenge that you experience in work or school, or as a result of a life change or traumatic event. Stress can impact emotions, mind and body in a way that negatively affect your overall health. (Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions – Wellbeing)
Survivor/ Victim	An individual who has suffered physical or emotional harm, property damage or economic loss as the result of the mission or alleged commission of an offence. (Canadian Victims Bill of Rights)
Trauma-Informed approach	A strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma which emphasizes physical psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. (BC Gov Website)
Unsafe Touch	Unwanted physical contact such as touching or getting too close in a sexual manner. (Adapted from Statistics Canada: Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2018: Initial findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces)
Upstander	Someone who intervenes on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied. (Adapted from Creating Consent Culture)

