



Key Considerations for School Mental Health Professionals Related to Student Mental Health Check-Ins

During the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting school closures, there is concern about students with identified (and/or emerging) mental health needs. There is also uncertainty related to the role that school mental health professionals can play in supporting students while working remotely. And, there are differences in capacity across boards and communities when it comes to providing services to meet student mental health needs in our present circumstances.

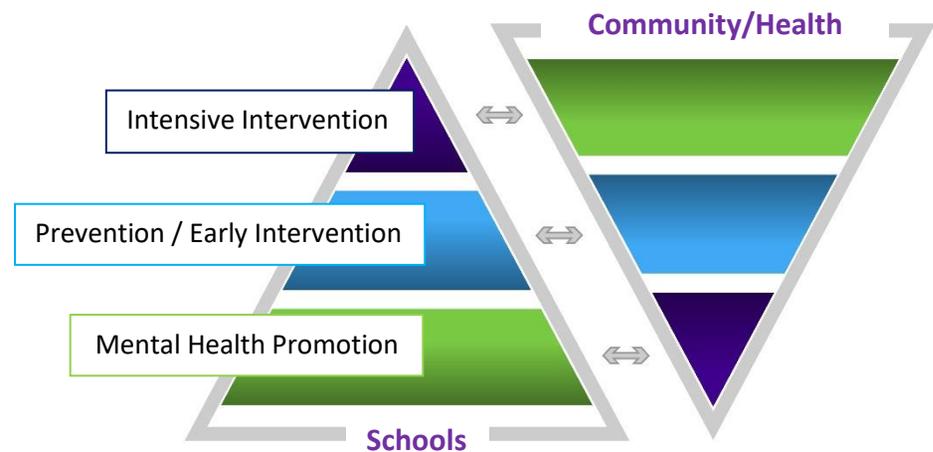
Overall Objectives for the Mental Health Check-In:

1. Assess the student's current functioning and safety
2. Review and revise the support or safety plan, as needed
3. Hear the student's concerns, worries, or questions
4. Observe and highlight strengths and successes
5. Reinforce connections with others

Adapted from Wellington Catholic District School Board

Before offering these considerations, it is important to note that we are working in unprecedented times and that schools are only one part of the system of care for students experiencing mental health problems. Certainly, a whole system response is required. It may be helpful to remember that in usual times, school mental health professionals focus primarily on prevention and early intervention services, while we rely on community/health partners for more intensive and longer duration care, and on crisis responders to help young people in emergency situations. While the times before us may call for a shift in focus, we should remember that we are not shouldering the load alone, and that it is essential to work with our community partners to co-plan service delivery, identify gaps, and create shared solutions in support of child and youth mental health.

As registered school mental health professionals, we need to stay calm, show leadership, and lean on first principles. We need to review our College guidelines when we consider the students on our caseloads currently. And, we need to embrace new ways of working to do our part to help. We can do that best when we work together. This Info-Sheet is one way to assist in moving towards a consistent and systematic response for students with mental health concerns. It focuses on considerations for conducting mental health check-ins in the next few weeks.



The considerations outlined below are offered as a resource to assist school mental health professionals in (1) preparing for student mental health check-ins, (2) engaging with the student / family, and (3) managing follow-up. These suggestions are **in no way** a replacement for clinical judgement or clinical supervision, nor do they replace guidelines for virtual practice offered through the regulated Colleges.* Rather, this high-level resource is offered for consideration and should be adapted to each board’s unique student mental health support structure. You are encouraged to seek additional guidance from your supervisor prior to initiating mental health supports for students.

* please be sure to review the guidance to members around use and cautions related to technology and digital methods of mental health care delivery

BEFORE - PREPARING FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-INS		
CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS	TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS	ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Clear Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have a clear understanding of the board/department direction related to student mental health check-ins? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have a clear understanding of what is expected of me for a student mental health check-in? <input type="checkbox"/> Can I check in with my supervisor or colleagues to practice what a check-in might look like? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have an idea about how long most check-ins should take? 	<p>Telephone Contact Option</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Can I do this check-in by telephone, or do I need “eyes on” for this contact? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the student/family have a telephone? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the student have a personal cell phone? <input type="checkbox"/> Can I block caller ID to ensure privacy? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the space from which I will initiate the call ensure privacy and confidentiality? <input type="checkbox"/> Can I contact the student ahead of time to ensure they are in a good location to take the call? <p>Telephone contact can be the most familiar and easiest method for reaching out to students for a general mental health check-in.</p>	<p>Consultation with Supervisor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have I checked in to advise my supervisor of my schedule for planned contacts with students in the event their support or direction is required? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there any students that I am concerned about where a consultation with my supervisor would be helpful before making the contact? <input type="checkbox"/> If I don’t have a clinical manager, is there a registered colleague I can speak with to ensure I am well-prepared clinically?
<p>Self-Check</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How am I doing? <input type="checkbox"/> Is this a good time to connect with a student / family? <input type="checkbox"/> How can I ready myself to be fully present for the student? <input type="checkbox"/> How will I space the check-ins so I have time to refresh between each one? 		<p>Practical Set-Up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have I arranged my home space to allow for privacy and confidentiality when conducting student check-ins? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have a secure and locked place to keep notes from student check-ins? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have a secure space for electronic files? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have a schedule for initiating contact with students/families?

CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS	TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS	ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Check-In Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have I clearly considered the objective for initiating contact? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have a brief agenda itemizing the points to be covered? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have a way to describe the check-in and establish limits to help with managing expectations? <input type="checkbox"/> Is my plan based on a review of notes from the last documented contact? <input type="checkbox"/> How would I respond if asked about the frequency of my availability? <input type="checkbox"/> How would I respond if asked about another student wanting to initiate contact? 	<p>Technology-Enabled Option (video conferencing, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What are the policies and practice guidelines that I need to follow? (e.g., regulatory College and Board policy) <input type="checkbox"/> How familiar comfortable am I with using virtual platforms? <input type="checkbox"/> How secure are the virtual platforms available to me? <input type="checkbox"/> How familiar / comfortable will the student be with a virtual check-in? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there reliable internet where the student resides? <input type="checkbox"/> What is the contingency plan if the technology malfunctions? 	<p>Knowledge of Community Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do I know which community / health services and supports are available in my region in the event a referral is required? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have an up-to-date list of telephone numbers and contact information for community supports? <input type="checkbox"/> Have I reviewed my obligations related to mandatory reporting and do I have numbers handy for the Children’s Aid Society in my area? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have the distress line and Kids’ Help Phone numbers handy to share with students at the end of each call?
<p>Informed Consent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is there a parent and/or adult ally that I want to be part of the check-in or check-in with separately? <input type="checkbox"/> What is my plan for obtaining informed consent from the parent/guardian and student for the mental health check-in? <input type="checkbox"/> How will I validate the identity of the student / parent/ guardian over the phone? 	<p>Access to Files</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have a listing of my current caseload with student/family contact information? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have access to all the required information regarding the students / families with whom I have developed crisis / support plans? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have access to my notes regarding the last documented contact with each student? 	<p>Record-Keeping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How will I record my contact with the student? <input type="checkbox"/> What will I say to convey that this check-in information will be included as a case note in the student’s confidential file? <input type="checkbox"/> How will I get clinical sign off on my notes by my supervisor (if needed)?
<p>Safety and Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How will I assess for safety / risk during the check-ins? <input type="checkbox"/> What is the response plan in the event that the student is at elevated risk? <input type="checkbox"/> Should I explore the proximity and availability of a trusted adult in the event the student is at elevated risk? 		

DURING – ENGAGING WITH THE STUDENT AND / OR FAMILY:

CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS	TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS	ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Engaging Virtually</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What can help you to set a warm and calm tone for the virtual contact? <input type="checkbox"/> Do you have an introductory script to help you to begin each check-in? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there any personalized connection points that you have with the student that might make them feel at ease during this difficult time? <input type="checkbox"/> How might you validate the student’s feelings of fear, worry, distress, etc. while keeping the brief check-in action-oriented and positive? 	<p>Managing Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have you left time to test the technology in advance of each call? <input type="checkbox"/> Will you remember to ask where student is and whether the space they are in is private and confidential for the call / check-in? <input type="checkbox"/> Is it appropriate to explore the accessibility / proximity of the student to a trusted adult during the call to establish ways of contacting them remotely, in case this is needed? <input type="checkbox"/> Do you have notes and back-up plans if the technology fails during the check-in? <input type="checkbox"/> Can you leave time during the check-in to ask the student about their comfort level with the method used? <input type="checkbox"/> If the student selects another method, are you open to that? 	<p>Confirm Appointment Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> When will you provide notice about the check-in time? <input type="checkbox"/> Will you offer a reminder?
<p>Attending to Professional Boundaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How can you ensure that the student understands that you are maintaining the same professional boundaries as before, though the method of communicating may feel different? <input type="checkbox"/> How will you keep your own worries and fears in check, though we are all living through a time of uncertainty and challenge? 		<p>Keeping Notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have I documented contact with the student in real time, as per my regular procedure for record-keeping? <input type="checkbox"/> Have I been mindful of privacy and confidentiality throughout the check-in? <p>In Case of Emergency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have emergency care protocols handy in case the student needs an urgent response? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I have numbers for distress lines available? <input type="checkbox"/> Do I know how to contact my supervisor and/or clinical colleague if I need an urgent consultation?
<p>Check-In Integrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How will you ensure that the contact stays at the level of check-in, and does not turn into a lengthy clinical conversation? <input type="checkbox"/> How can you keep the focus on things the student can do to feel better, rather than becoming more overwhelmed? 		<p>Keeping Up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have I routinely checked my College website to ensure I am up-to-date on the latest information and expectations related to remote, technology-enabled care?

AFTER – MANAGING FOLLOW-UP:		
CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS	TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS	ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Clinical Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What is the level of need for follow-up for this student? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there any further actions needed during this initial phase of school closure? <input type="checkbox"/> Is another check-in required within the next few weeks? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there any follow-up contacts or referrals required? 	<p>Protecting your Devices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have you protected all of your devices to ensure that confidential information and contact information is not accessible to others? See College guidelines. <input type="checkbox"/> Have you stored your devices in a safe place so they are unlikely to be stolen or accessed? 	<p>Finalize Notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have you completed your case note / clinical recording as per College / Board procedure? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you updated any contact information for the student / family? <input type="checkbox"/> Is your documentation stored in a secure location where access is restricted? (e.g., locked filing cabinet, locked room).
<p>Supervision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are there any issues to be flagged for follow-up with your supervisor? <input type="checkbox"/> Do you need to debrief the check-in to go over any decisions or “niggles”? <input type="checkbox"/> Would you like to consult with your supervisor or a clinical colleague for support? 		
<p>Self-Care</p> <p>Remote check-ins are a new way of working and may feel uncomfortable and a “stretch” for your practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What will you do now to help you to maintain your personal resiliency? <input type="checkbox"/> What might you do after you finish all of the check-ins for the day? 		

We hope this Info-Sheet is helpful to you. Working alongside of you, we anticipate creating other supports to meet the evolving needs in coming days and weeks (e.g., training for remote early intervention and support services).

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References:

The College of Psychologists of Ontario

<http://www.cpo.on.ca/>

College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario

<https://www.crpo.ca/>

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

<https://www.ocswssw.org/>



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