

Parent eBulletin – *Bringing School Home* September 2011 edition



The Simcoe County District School Board produces this e-bulletin to help parents support children on their journey of lifelong learning. We know positive connections between home and school support student achievement. In each edition you'll find practical tips and strategies to help your child achieve success in those important years of learning from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

Bringing School Home is available through the Simcoe County District School Board website (www.scdsb.on.ca). As well, parents, guardians and other interested members of our school communities may [subscribe through our website](#) and have the bulletin e-mailed directly to their e-mail accounts (readers may also unsubscribe at any time). Please [click here](#) to submit your comments and feedback.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH: How can I support my child's mental health and well-being?

In the Simcoe County District School Board, we know how important it is to nurture a culture of caring and to provide a learning environment that promotes a sense of well-being among students.

If your child is uneasy about the new school year, you can help to smooth the transition back to school. Here are three steps to take:

- **Discuss and manage concerns** – give kids the opportunity to voice their fears about starting or returning to school. Then, work with them to brainstorm solutions like reviewing subjects your child struggles with or planning a play date with school friends.
- **Discuss positive aspects of the change** – be encouraging and show excitement when reminding children they are getting to see old friends again, learning new subjects, and gaining new opportunities to join extracurricular groups or clubs.
- **Celebrate the change** – parents can schedule a fun event to mark the first few weeks back at school. Having a special family dinner or a 'back-to-school' party with friends will help ease the transition.



SCDSB schools are committed to supporting the mental health of students in our classrooms. When a staff member observes a student experiencing mental health issues, he/she shares these observations and concerns with parents and guardians. Where appropriate, information is provided regarding suitable health, child and youth services, and consultation may be required with school administrators and the special education resource teacher. If required, accommodations are developed to address the needs of the student with behavioural-emotional challenges. If the problem persists or is especially complex, the school principal may obtain additional support from board level special education coaches or consultants. Further social work or psychological service support may also be requested, with consent of the parent or guardian.

When you need specialized help



We all experience ups-and-downs or days when we feel more stressed than usual or even overwhelmed, children and youth included. Individuals react to life's challenges differently – some might become fearful and want to avoid everyday activities. Some might complain about minor aches and pains that the doctor has ruled out as medically based. Some children's anxiety comes out as excessive energy or what some call "hyperactivity." Others might become frustrated, angry or even aggressive. When these behaviours persist and become more frequent, longer in duration and/or intensity, or when these behaviours start to interfere with the quality of your child's or

youth's life, or the lives of others, developing a plan is always a good idea.

Making an appointment with the doctor is usually a good place to start in case the cause of the problem is something medical. Beyond that, accessing specialized mental health services can help. You can also call '211', which is a local service directory assistance number: the operator will help you find the appropriate person or agency to help you and your child.

When such difficulties appear suddenly and are related to an identifiable event, you can call the Mental Health Crisis Lin at 705-728-5044 or 1-888-893-8333.

If you feel that the stress of the school year is too much for you and your child to handle on your own, seeking expert advice from a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, will help you better manage and cope. Don't be afraid to seek help! A list of related resources is published further below in this newsletter.

How does the SCDSB respond when stressful events occur in a school community?

Schools are communities of students, teachers, staff, volunteers, parents and guardians with strong social bonds. When stressful events occur which affect members of a school, the school community members may need additional support.

When a school community experiences a traumatic incident, they have the option to seek additional support from our Crisis Response Team. Traumatic incidents can range from weather disasters to violent incidents in the local community, fatal accidents, or serious injuries. Research and experience demonstrate that schools manage crises more effectively when supported by trained and prepared colleagues. To this end, the Simcoe County District School Board has been developing and providing this type of crisis response support since September 1991.

Crisis response team members are SCDSB staff who normally fulfill a variety of other roles in the system at the school and board level. When they are called to help respond to a crisis they will go to the school and provide assistance in creating a supportive atmosphere as the school community deals with the situation or loss. This support may be provided through setting up 'quiet rooms' for students and staff, helping to communicate any details that can be shared within the school and home to families, setting up in-class activities to help students deal with a stressful event, and helping to access community support. In brief, SCDSB's crisis response teams provide an extremely valuable service to help deal with a range of situations and to help cope when a school community experiences a high level of stress.

Sources

- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [National Association of School Psychologists](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care](#)
- [Parent Information Center](#)
- [Open Minds, Healthy Minds](#)

On June 22, 2011, with the support of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Education, the government released [Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy](#). The document offers a comprehensive approach to transforming the mental health and addiction systems. The Strategy aims to strengthen services, create a responsive and integrated system and build awareness and capacity within communities.

LINKS

We invite you to visit www.scdsb.on.ca often for news, facts, school information, Board highlights and hundreds of other pages about Simcoe County's public education system.

Some useful links on the SCDSB public website include:

Safe & Healthy Schools

This section on the SCDSB website provides information and resources on bullying and cyber bullying, healthy living and internet safety: <http://scdsb.on.ca/parents-corner/safe-schools/>.

Character Education

The SCDSB works collaboratively to provide safe supportive environments for positive learning and working experiences for all students and staff. Board and school initiatives are designed to teach and encourage students to be positive, productive members of our community. Character Development is the intentional modeling, teaching, and practicing of positive character traits and is an integral part of each day. For more information on Character Education in the SCDSB, [click here](#).

Special Education

The SCDSB is committed to providing the most appropriate educational opportunities for all students in an environment that enables all students to reach their goals, some of which are self-defined. Students' unique learning styles are recognized and planned for in a caring and sensitive manner, enabling them to learn and participate with dignity and respect. To accomplish this a range of services are offered, where possible, in neighbourhood schools. Educational services are delivered using a collaborative and flexible process centered on the strengths and needs of the students, inclusive of family, school, and community, and based on the best learning outcomes for the students. The student's "voice" is key to all decisions made on behalf of and with the student (view the SCDSB's [2011-2012 Special Education Report](#)). The following webpage has information on Special Education resources, individual education plans, and parents' guide: <http://scdsb.on.ca/programs-services/special-education/>.

Parenting Courses

The SCDSB Learning Centres offer a series of free (to parents of children in school) programs for parents to help them develop understanding, knowledge, skills and specific techniques that can be used at home to support and encourage the healthy development of their child. Through these courses, parents find useful information and strategies to help their children succeed at school and discover ways to build a positive relationship with their child's school. For more information and to view the fall schedule of programs, please [click here](#).

Our Internet surfing this month leads to helpful resources about mental health/wellness:

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit – Healthy Schools Fact Sheet

http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Libraries/JFY_Schools/Healthy_Schools_fact_sheet.sflb

Mental Health Resource Directory – Simcoe County

http://www.ementalhealth.ca/simcoe/en/Suicide_a1_b97.html

Simcoe County Child, Youth and Families Coalition - Services for Children and Youth With Behavioural Issues

http://www.simcoecountycoalition.ca/en/Sub_Pages/servicemap.aspx

Kids Help Phone – a free, anonymous and confidential phone and online professional counselling service for youth

<http://org.kidshelpphone.ca/en>

Ontario Public School Boards' Association – Taking Mental Health to School

http://www.opsba.org/index.php?q=advocacy_and_action/child_and_youth_mental_health

Children's Mental Health Ontario

<http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/>

Back-to-school tips from the Ontario Psychological Association

<http://www.psych.on.ca/files/nonmembers/back%20to%20school%202011.pdf>

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“The professionals in our education system are often in the best position to identify the need for mental health services at an early age. The additional resources we are providing to our educators will help break down barriers and ensure our children get the support and services they need to succeed.”

~ Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Education

About the SCDSB

The Simcoe County District School Board is deeply committed to ensuring all learners have the opportunity to realize their dreams within a vibrant and successful public education system. We are very proud of our 50,000 students who are learning and achieving in more than 100 schools and seven adult learning centres throughout our urban and rural communities. Working with school communities, our dedicated and skilled staff members provide quality programs to help students develop lifelong learning skills in safe, caring environments. Our schools are located in the Huronia and Georgian Bay regions of south-central Ontario.