



 Oregon Department of Education

Supporting the mental health of Oregon's schools: Building care, connection & community

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Oregon Department of Education



- New school year likely to elicit a range of emotions.
- Begin with reflection and connection to support health and well-being and kick the year off right.



What communities are asking for

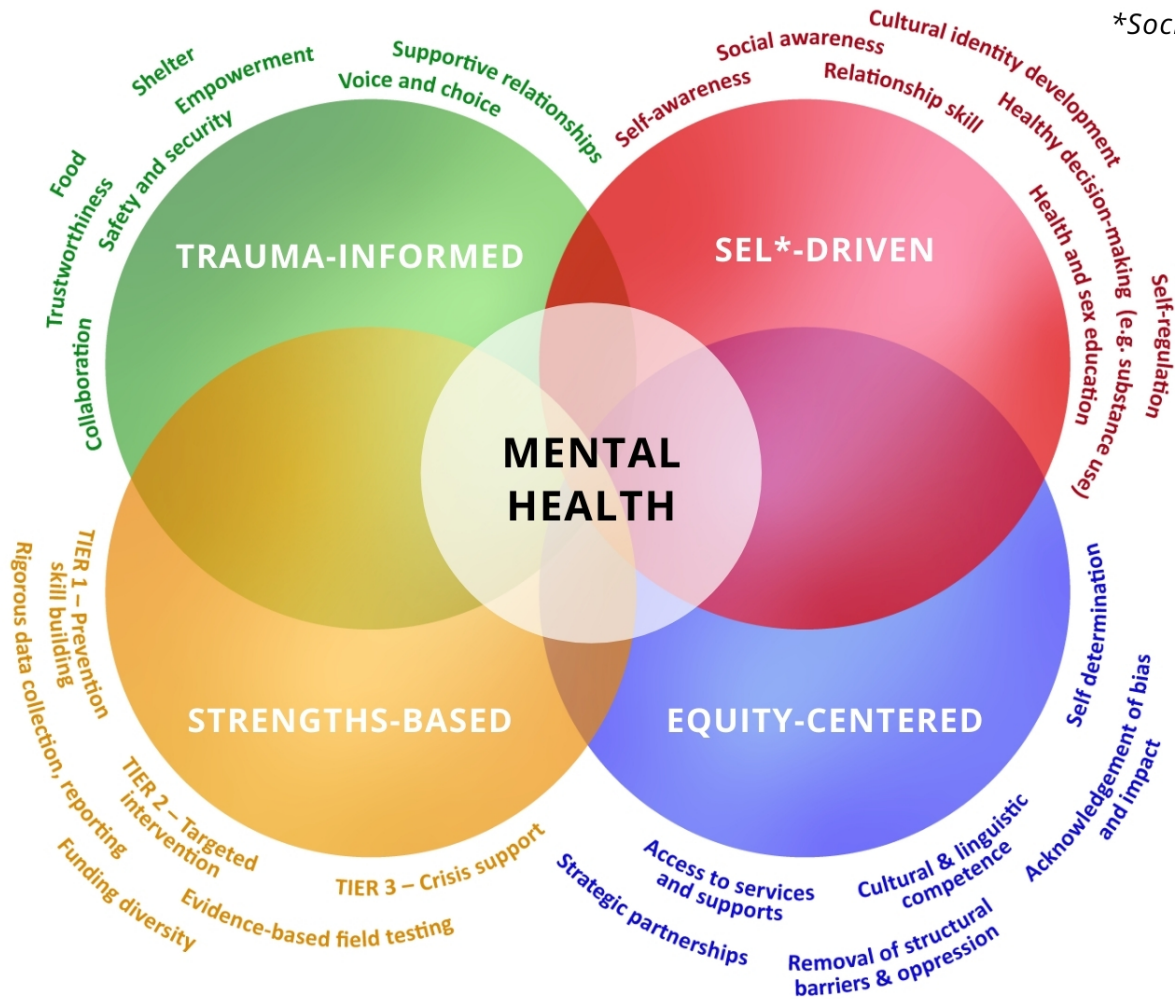
- Focus on mental health.
- Time and space to build relationships, care and connection.
- Permission to build in mental health-promoting activities into classroom time.
- Culturally-responsive strategies that honor individuals' ways of knowing, being and lived experience.
- Systems that support staff mental health.
- To be welcomed, acknowledged, appreciated and cared for.



Integrated Model of Mental Health

Mental health emphasizes strengths, resilience, and enhancing social-emotional abilities

**Social-emotional learning*



CONTINUUM OF CARE

Physiological needs

Safety & security

Relationships, connections, community

Purpose & self-efficacy

Self-actualization

Guiding values

- Focus on health promotion.
- Celebrates the ways of being and knowing that people bring to the school community.
- Supported by 4, equally-important pillars of practice.
- Strengths- not deficit-based.
- Centered on collaboration, equity, flexibility, meeting communities and people where they are.



- Inviting school districts to begin the year with Care and Connection week.
- One full week for staff and administrators before school starts.
- First full week of school for students and families.



- Dedicated time to build on what you are already doing to create care, connection and community.
- Creating time and space to reflect, connect, and make meaning of the last year.





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Tools, Resources on the Care & Connection Webpage

- ODE providing a toolkit:
 - Sample letters for families.
 - Activities and ideas for creating care, connection, and community.
 - Posters and banners that you can customize.
 - Print, television and radio ads.
 - Social media campaign and customizable templates.

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/SchoolSafety/Pages/Announcements.aspx>



- Preparation
- We welcome you
- We acknowledge you
- We appreciate you
- We care about you



Preparation

For Staff

Prior to the start of the school year, create opportunities for staff to informally connect. Provide extra support and mentorship to staff and teachers who are new to the school community and/or the profession.

Examples include:

- “Buddy” program for teachers new to the school and/or new to the profession
- Tours of the school
- Welcome breakfast/potluck lunch
- Welcome bag of existing school swag (t-shirts, hats, water bottles, lanyards, etc.)
- Welcome signs
- Open forums/Q&As hosted by administrators for staff to ask questions and access support
- Specific training/PD for staff on addressing the past year, recognizing the ways in which COVID-19 disproportionately affected BIPOC students in particular, and supporting staff and students in healing and recognizing their own strength and resilience
- Other ideas you may have that work for your school/school district

For Students

Create welcoming classroom spaces. Are there extra touches that can make your school spaces more welcoming prior to students’ arrival?

Examples include:

- Send an email or text, or place a phone call, from an administrator to students asking what questions or concerns they have for the upcoming year
- Provide students with a welcome packet of resources (school map, counselor contact information, helpline information, etc.)
- Warm lighting
- Inviting music
- Colorful pictures/objects
- Welcome signs
- Name tags for desks
- Other ideas you may have that work for your school/school district

“We welcome you” | Daily welcome throughout the school year

For Staff

Using the same strategy created for entry screening, welcome each person who enters the school daily. Invite building administrators to greet each staff member at the door each morning.

Regular informal, non-evaluative check-ins between administrators and staff.

Examples include:

- Asking staff, "How are you feeling today?"
- Have cell phone / personal technology-free staff meetings
- Hold meetings in circles of chairs (so staff have more opportunity to feel engaged and connected)
- Clear, proactive communication between school board, school district, building administrators, and staff

For Students

Administrators welcome each student as they enter the school building daily. Teachers welcome each student at the classroom door at the beginning of each day or class.

Consider creative strategies or gestures that allow students to express themselves (sounds, gestures, movements) that teachers can model. Some students may not seem eager or happy to be at school. Offer them extra time, space, and encouragement as they enter, and give them permission to not participate or to invent their own option if they choose.

Examples include:

- High five or air high five
- Hug or air hug
- Dance
- Elbow bump
- Other ideas you may have that work for your school/school district

“We acknowledge you” | The first week of class & frequently during the academic year

For Staff	For Students
<p>Create time, permission and space for staff to connect as frequently as possible via community exercises, groups and activities. Make space in staff meetings for connection, expression and appreciation.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Ice breaker exercises● Team building activities● Recognition of simple acts of kindness● Recognition of staff achievements and accomplishments	<p>Devote the first week of school to developmentally-appropriate, voluntary relationship building exercises. Provide choices for students to use various mediums to express themselves.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Art● Music● Movement● Creative writing● Song● Dance

“We appreciate you” | The first week of class & frequently throughout the school year

For Staff

Create time, permission, and space for relationship building, and the formation of smaller groups within school communities.

Examples include:

- Consider taking time during these meetings to invite each person to offer a response to “What I would like you to know about me is _____”
- Encourage creative responses using whatever medium is most comfortable for the individual.
- Emphasize resilience/healing/renewal rather than “getting back to normal.”
- Create space and time for connections across grade levels, content areas, classified/licensed staff, etc.
- Destigmatize the need for additional care or support to manage personal or professional stress.

For Students

Create time and space for students and teachers to get to know each other.

Examples include:

- Consider inviting students to participate in an exercise where they respond to the statement, “What I would like you to know about me is _____”
- Give students time and creative license to develop a response through strategies such as: art, movement, music, singing, sharing an item or idea.
- Invite students to choose how they express themselves including the option to remain silent. All forms of expression are welcome.

“We care about you” | Always

For Staff

Relationships take time. Make certain to build time and opportunity for care, connection and community building during the school week. Create an “open door” policy where staff have the opportunity to connect with leaders and share ideas.

Examples include:

- Principals can hold “office hours” once or twice a week to meet with school staff and address questions/see how things are going
- Staff are asked to meet each other where they’re at, recognizing that, like students, adults will have a range of reactions about returning to full-time, in-person instruction

For Students

Develop “open door” policies and dedicated time when students can speak with their teachers, counselors, and other trusted adults privately, and connect with peers.

Examples include:

- Allow students to form prosocial clubs or groups where they can foster mutual interests, relationships, collaboration and community
- Reduce or waive participation fees for activities and sports
- Host regular sessions in which students can provide feedback to administrators and staff
- Regularly celebrate student accomplishments, both academic and personal
- Make certain that students are aware of, and have access to mental health services and supports.



ODE's Mental Health Toolkit

Leading from Strength to Promote Mental Health

1. Strengths-based strategies
2. Addressing Traumatic Stress
3. Elevating Student Voice
4. Centering Equity, Racial Equity and Anti-Racism
5. Promoting Inclusive School Environments
6. Multi-tiered Systems of Support

Tools, Resources on the Care & Connection Webpage



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- For more information:

Care & Connection Campaign

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/SchoolSafety/Pages/Announcements.aspx>

Mental Health Resources

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/SchoolSafety/Pages/Safe and Inclusive Schools.aspx>

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**THIS YEAR, A LITTLE
NERVOUS IS NORMAL.**



After so long away, bells, hallways, clubs and quizzes aren't second nature anymore. That's why Oregon schools are kicking off with a focus on restoring the care, connection and community that come with in-person learning. Visit Oregon.gov/readyschools to learn more.

