**MENTALLY HEALTHY RETURN TO SCHOOL**

Welcome back! Whether remote learning or in-building learning, we are all facing a very different return to school. At UGDSB we have committed to ensuring a welcoming, safe and mentally healthy return to school. Although we don’t know exactly what the next months will look like we DO know that the best way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships (Wheatley, 2004, Distrub Me, Please). We need to all commit to continued learning and, especially, to reflecting deeply on the inequities that have been amplified through the pandemic (School Mental Health Ontario, 2020). We need to SEE students and give them space to tell their stories, to feel like they belong, to build relationships and to feel safe and welcomed. And we need to continue to prioritize mental health and well-being at our schools.

We are excited to share with our parent/family community the launch of the UGDSB Umbrella Project! Through a teacher-led curriculum and school-based activities this program helps us all to explore ways to manage the everyday stressors of life. Every month a new theme will be the focus across the board from staff, to students and beyond. We hope that you will join us in this important work because as caregivers you have a powerful impact on childhood well-being.

**WHY AN UMBRELLA?** The umbrella represents the ways in which our skill sets can protect us from and help us work through some of the everyday stressors we are faced with. Just like the weather there will be calm days and stormy days. We can’t control the weather, but we can keep ensuring that we have a strong umbrella.

**HOW CAN YOU PARTICPATE?** Every month my Talking About Mental Health article will focus on the theme of the month., This month is the introduction of this important work. So, what can you do at home?

* Talk about what things help you face difficult days?
* Make a list of words that represent “wellness” to you
* Keep a wellness jar with words, pictures or phrases that can be taken out by other family members when they need a little boost
* Put something on your fridge (maybe a big umbrella cutout!) that represents the skills you will be building through the year
* Talk about how to find support if you aren’t feeling mentally healthy

***Keep your eyes open for next month’s theme! Join our wellness community and follow along with the Upper Grand’s Umbrella Project each month. You can also follow on social media #UGUmbrella.***

Jenny Marino, Mental Health Lead

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