

School Mental Health
ASSIST

Mental Health Awareness Webinar Series

Facilitation Guide



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Welcome to the School Mental Health ASSIST Webinar Series!

This resource has been designed to help to build mental health awareness within Ontario District School Boards. It is one of several vehicles that School Mental Health ASSIST will provide over the next several months and years to support capacity-building in school mental health.

You are receiving this Facilitation Guide because you have been identified as the individual, or team, that will consider how best to make use of the Webinar Series in your District School Board. This is a very flexible resource and we urge you to tailor its use to your context.

Every District School Board in Ontario is somewhere along the continuum of understanding and action in regards to school mental health. You know best where you are in this journey! Those of you just beginning work in this area may want to begin by simply reviewing the webinar material as a leadership team, rather than disseminating it with staff groups. Those who have taken on several different approaches to mental health literacy may want to use the material to step back for a moment to reflect on your overarching strategy for building capacity in this area in a systematic way. And those of you who have created foundations and have been waiting for material to advance professional development may find the webinar series to be a timely support to your efforts.

You will notice that the webinar series is broken down by audience, based on our understanding of knowledge needs for each of these stakeholder groups.

Mental Health Awareness Webinar Series Topics

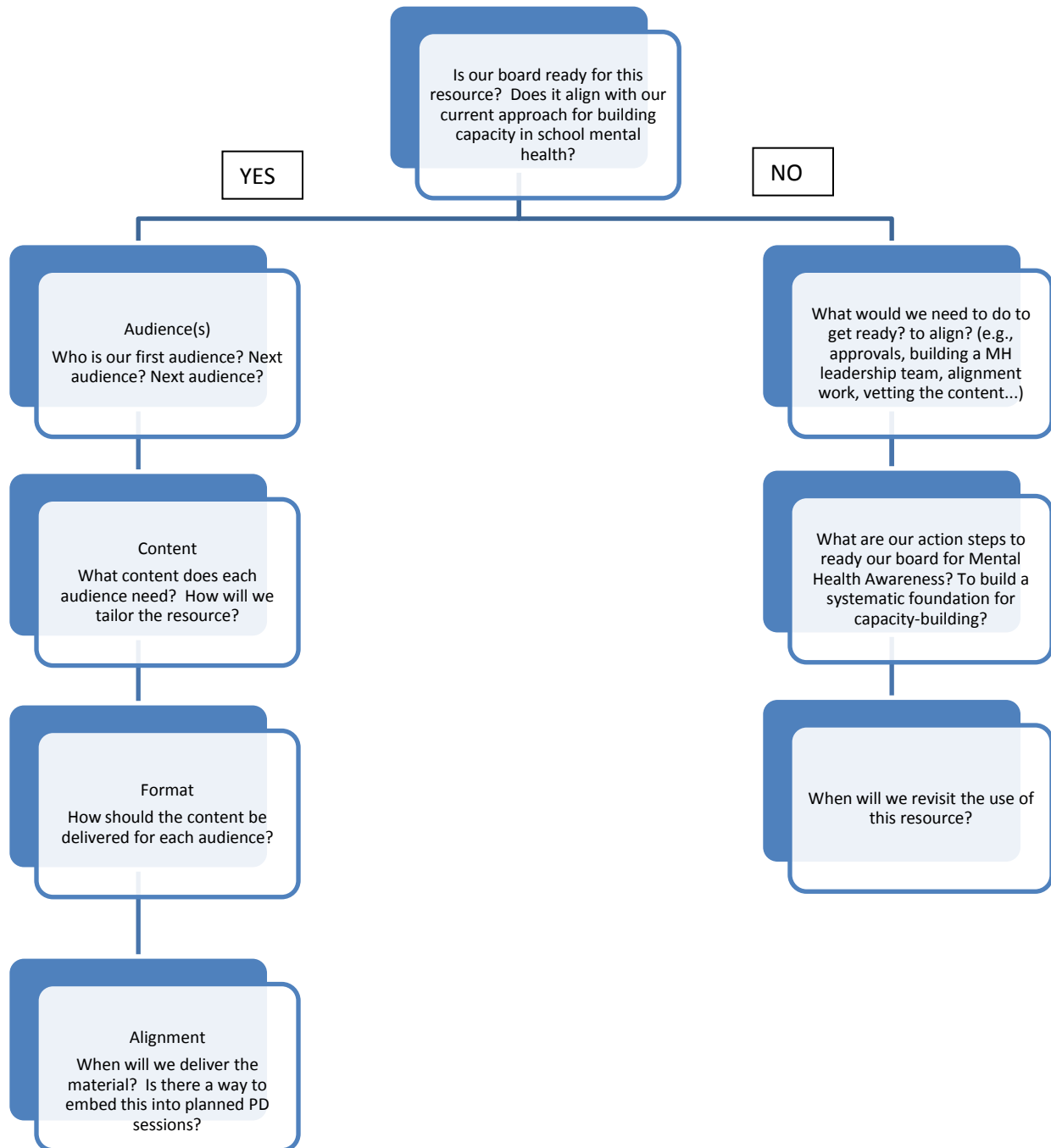
1. **Mental Health Awareness in Ontario School Boards**
 - ▶ Audiences: All Education Sector Audiences
2. **Building and Sustaining District Conditions for Effective School Mental Health**
 - ▶ Audiences: Directors, Superintendents, Chief Social Workers / Psychologists
3. **Building and Sustaining School Conditions for Effective School Mental Health**
 - ▶ Audiences: Superintendents, School Administrators, School Mental Health Professionals, Guidance, Student Success, Special Educators
4. **Building and Sustaining Classroom Conditions Effective School Mental Health**
 - ▶ Audiences: Teachers, Educational Assistants

Each of the sessions is provided in the form of a webinar, but you need not view it in this way. You are free to deliver the sessions via PowerPoint slides (a script is attached for your reference in the Notes section of each slide). Also, you may choose to select from the available slides to build your own slide deck for the audiences that you will share the material with. This flexibility allows you to tailor the resource to the needs in your setting.

We encourage you to begin to determine fit of the Webinar Series by viewing the webinar and/or reviewing the slides. The rest of the Facilitation Guide will help you to think through how it might work in your board.

Considerations for Using the Mental Health Awareness Webinar Series

After you have reviewed the Webinar materials, the following guiding questions may be helpful to you in considering this resource for your Board:



School Mental Health Capacity-Building Principles

1. School Mental Health is a complex topic! It can't be "learned" in a one-time workshop. True capacity-building involves an iterative process of acquiring knowledge and skills.
2. In the past, in most boards, mental health capacity-building efforts have been fragmented, led by different departments or external experts, on a variety of topics and themes. We encourage a systematic approach to professional development in this area.
3. We recommend that professional learning be cascaded through the system in a way that new learners will have someone with more knowledge to turn to for help. A sequence that begins with senior leaders, moves to school leaders, and then to classroom educators is probably most beneficial.
4. Research shows that educators like to learn from engaging experts. For many of you, these experts reside within your district! If you have social workers or psychological consultants in your board, these professionals can often bring a wealth of knowledge to professional learning in mental health. Moreover, these staff members can assist with ongoing coaching within a system of capacity-building. If you don't have the benefit of trained mental health professionals within your board, consider the role that your community partners might play (e.g., community mental health agencies, hospitals, universities). Be cautious about engaging experts who offer one-time workshops without the ability to provide ongoing support in a cost-effective manner.
5. Research also shows that professional learning occurs best when educators have a chance to process knowledge in small, like groups. When designing mental health awareness sessions, consider staff development standards and build in abundant opportunity for dialogue in small groups (see below for Facilitation Tips). In addition, providing opportunity for educators to "try on" suggested strategies between sessions, and then to debrief the implementation, can be a very useful method of deepening the learning.
6. It is important to be mindful that school mental health is a sensitive topic. Many members of your audience will be struggling with their own, or a family member's, mental health problem as they listen to the session. It is important to acknowledge this, and to have a safety net of support if audience members become distressed during the session.
7. Further, in introducing school mental health, we need to be careful to avoid a perception that this will increase the workload of already busy staff members. Instead, it is important to position professional learning initiatives in this area as a way to help educators and administrators to better manage the one in five students who struggle with mental health problems, and to create school and classroom settings that promote well-being for all, including staff members.

Facilitation Tips

While the information in the Mental Health Awareness Series is presented in webinar format, it does not need to be delivered in this way to all audiences. Webinars are most useful for self-study and small group learning. If you decide that you would want to use this resource with larger audiences, we would recommend that you build a workshop that includes a variety of media and adheres to good staff development principles. We list some Facilitation Tips below. If you have additional ideas to add to this list, please contact us. We anticipate that this Guide will evolve over time, with feedback from the field.

1. Engage your Audience

Mental health can be a difficult topic. It becomes more comfortable when we frame the issue positively, and look for ways to encourage positive well-being. You may wish to begin the workshop with something designed to draw participants in (e.g., read/share a story about a student with mental health difficulties and how the school system helped them, have participants pair up to talk about a student that they are concerned about (no names) that they will carry with them through the workshop, invite participants to write down 3 words that come to mind when thinking about mental health, then the same for mental illness). The video, *Open Up*, produced by the School-Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse Consortium is an example of a tool that can also be helpful in this regard. Contact School Mental Health ASSIST if you would like to use this video.

2. Limit Didactic Segments to 20 minutes maximum

Participants need time to digest this material. Chunk information into segments and allow sufficient time for meaningful dialogue in between didactic learning. Consider carefully the reflection questions that you pose so that negative problem talk and reinforcement of negative attitudes are minimized.

3. Keep Dialogue Spaces Safe

Set some ground rules (implicitly or explicitly) to ensure that participants and students are safe. Participants need to be understand that while they may be inspired to self-disclose about their own mental health worries during the workshop, they may want to think through how they will feel about this the next day, the next week, and so on. While we all wish that there was no stigma around mental health problems, the truth is that there are sometimes consequences to self-disclosure (how others see you, how you see yourself). We also need to keep students safe. Individual students should not be named or discussed during workshop time. Finally, it is good to consider the current mood and competing pressures for the group attending the workshop. Try to create an emotional space where participants do not feel rushed, where they can leave other pressures at the door.

4. Consider Your own Mental Health

Leading sessions in school mental health require considerable thought and energy. It is important to be mindful of your own well-being. When you can work as a team, this can help with both sharing the load and providing support. Also consider your own self-disclosures. As a leader, it can be helpful and stigma-reducing to offer information about your own experiences with mental health problems, to normalize this for others. At the same time, there are risks to doing so and you will want to consider this carefully, ahead of the workshop session.

Contact Us!

We hope that this Facilitation Guide will help you to make optimal use of the Mental Health Awareness Webinar Series. If you have questions that we have not answered here, please feel free to contact us:

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