

# Building Positive Mental Health at School

Social-Emotional Leadership can help build positive mental health in students and teachers.

## Youth Depression and Anxiety Is on the Rise

Historically, short periods of anxiety or depression have been common in adolescence, while more prolonged periods were rare. However, in recent years there has been a troubling increase in the number of adolescents with longer-term depression and anxiety.



Severe youth depression **increased 28%** over a five-year period.<sup>2</sup>



Self-harm and suicidal ideation rates have **more than doubled** since 2008.<sup>4</sup>

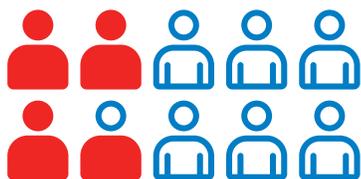
A systematic review of

 **19 studies**

\_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_

**12 countries**

revealed that anxiety is increasing worldwide.<sup>3</sup>



**39% of adolescents** will experience an anxiety disorder.<sup>5</sup>

# Long-Term Impacts of Childhood Mental Health

## Poor Mental Health Impacts Brain Development

Adolescence is one of the most critical times for brain development. Stress and depression during this time can cause long-term learning deficits and decreased emotional-regulation.



When the body's **stress** response is activated for long periods of time, the brain can't develop normally.



A child who has even one long-term experience with **depression** is far more likely to experience depression as an adult.

## Positive Mental Health Promotes Social and Emotional Development

Social and Emotional Skills Developed Through Positive Mental Health<sup>6</sup>:



Self-regulation



Empathy and  
Respect for Others



Sense of Connection  
and Purpose



Perseverance



Life Satisfaction

So, how can we **support** and **promote**  
kids' positive mental health?

# Schools Can Help Build the Positive Mental Health of Our Students

## Why Schools?

According to the World Health Organization, schools are one of the most important settings to build children's positive mental health because of:

### Time Students Spend in School

Average annual hours of compulsory instruction per student, 2011:

**1,007**

Chile  
(Highest)

**470**

Russia  
(Lowest)

**943**

United States

**791**

OECD Average

**1,167**

Mexico  
(Highest)

**848**

Czech Republic  
(Lowest)

**1,016**

United States

**907**

OECD Average

● Primary ● Secondary

SOURCE: OECD

### Frequent In-Person Peer Interactions



“**For 75% of teens**, school is the only place they spend time in person with friends on a daily basis.”<sup>8</sup>

*“Schools play a critical role in promoting the health and safety of young people and helping them establish lifelong healthy behaviors.”*

—Center for Disease and Control

# How Do Schools Build a Lifetime of Positive Mental Health?

Schools can lay a protective foundation for a lifetime of mental health by guiding the **development of social and emotional competencies**.

# 26%

**fewer** high-risk students developed **anxiety disorders** after SEL intervention compared with controls.<sup>10</sup>

Social-emotional learning interventions **effectively lower** rates of non-clinical anxiety and depression and build positive mental health.<sup>10</sup>



**In order for children to function effectively and develop a sense of identity, they need:**

- Social and emotional competencies.
- Opportunities to practice their skills.
- The confidence to use those skills constructively.

- World Health Organization<sup>1</sup>

**BUT** to be effective, implementation of school-based **SEL** interventions need the right foundation.

# The Pillars of Positive Mental Health

The **Canadian Comprehensive School Health Framework**<sup>11</sup> outlines a foundation for building positive mental health with four pillars.



## Pillar 1

### Social and Physical Environment

- Quality relationships among staff and students
- Emotional well-being of students
- Condition of buildings and surrounding grounds



## Pillar 2

### Teaching and Learning

Resources, activities, and curriculum that provide students with:

- Age-appropriate knowledge
- Experiences that build their skills
- Improvement to their health and well-being



## Pillar 3

### Partnerships and Services

Collaborations that support and advance positive mental health among:

- A school
- Students' families
- Surrounding community organizations



## Pillar 4

### Healthy School Policy

School procedures and policies that:

- Promote health and well-being
- Shape a respectful, welcoming, and caring school environment

# How *Leader in Me* Creates a Strong Foundation for Positive Mental Health

As a whole-school improvement process, *Leader in Me* provides educators with the training and structure needed to create environments that promote positive mental health through students' social-emotional development.



## Pillar 1: Social and Physical Environment

*Leader in Me* Schools use **key leadership practices** to build a feeling of community, establish a common vision, and build trust and unity through regular routines and activities.



Teachers and students reported that after implementing *Leader in Me* the "**classroom became a safe environment where all students felt comfortable pursuing goals.**"

BALDWIN, M.A., DR. LODICO, DR. VOEGTLE, BRUCE, DR. MARTONE (2012)  
THE COLLEGE OF SAINT ROSE

# 32%

more likely **LiM Lighthouse 4th graders**  
**"feel safe at school"** compared to non-LiM.

DR. DETHLEFS, ET AL.



## Pillar 2: Teaching and Learning

*Leader in Me* integrates **Social and Emotional Learning** schoolwide, from the classroom to the playground, and to families and home. As students learn valuable social-emotional skills they also apply these skills through public speaking, service learning, goal achievement, and Student Leadership Roles, where they plan, organize, and lead classroom or schoolwide activities, routines, and special events.



"Overall, an emerging theme from the parental interviews was that the school used **the leadership program to accentuate a child's strengths, and positive reinforcement encouraged leadership** and other desired behaviors."

DR. S. EVANS (2014) VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

---

# 33%

**increase** in independent social/emotional behaviors.

DR. ANDERSEN (2011) ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY



### Pillar 3: Partnerships and Services

Because a student's positive mental health is impacted largely by how well his or her needs are met, the *Leader in Me* focuses on creating empowering support systems schoolwide, and through training and partnerships with families and the larger community.



“By utilizing a **‘whole-school initiative’** such as the *Leader in Me*, the administrators were also able to include parents and community members in the initiative.”

DR. N. BRYANT (2016) CAPELLA UNIVERSITY

---

# 30.71%

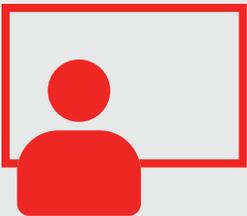
**improvement in parent's mental well-being**  
after completing 7 *Habits*<sup>®</sup> program, taking them  
from significantly below average to average well-being.

THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES OF SCOTLAND AND THE FIFE COUNCIL (2015)



## Pillar 4: Healthy School Policy

*Leader in Me* is a whole-school improvement process that begins by building the professional and personal capacity of the adults in the school. The adults then lay the foundation of a socially, emotionally, and academically supportive school environment by modeling healthy attitudes and behaviors, and collaboratively creating systems that reinforce the development of students' personal and interpersonal leadership.

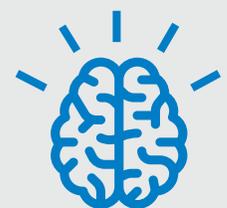


Significant correlation ( $p < .01$ ) between teachers' beliefs about school vision of leadership and the 7 Habits, indicating that: “[**Teachers**] not only believe that their students are leaders, but they envision them living the 7 Habits, as leaders would do.”

DR. K. CUMMINS (2015) UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE

Since starting *Leader in Me*, “there is a **stronger sense of cohesiveness** in the school environment as well as the classroom.”

DR. C. TIDD (2016) WALDEN UNIVERSITY



## REFERENCES

1. "Promoting Mental Health" (2004) *World Health Organization* [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/en/promoting\\_mhh.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/en/promoting_mhh.pdf)
2. "The State of Mental Health in America" (2017) *Mental Health America* — Nguyen, et al. <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/state-mental-health-america>
3. "Are child and adolescent mental health problems increasing in the 21st century? A systematic review." (2014) *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* — Bor, W., Dean, A., Najman, J., & Hayatbakhsh, R.
4. "Hospitalization for Suicide Ideation or Attempt: 2008-2015" (2018) *Pediatrics* — Plemmons G, et al.
5. "Any Anxiety Disorder" (2017) *National Insititute of MentalHealth* <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/any-anxiety-disorder.shtml>
6. "The human face of mental health and mental illness in Canada." (2006) *Public Health Agency of Canada*
7. "Making the Connection: Teen Health and Academic Achievement." (2017) *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* <https://www.cdc.gov/features/health-academic-achievement/index.html>
8. "Teens, Technology and Friendships." (2015) *Pew Research Center* — Lenhart, A., Smith, A., Anderson, M., Duggan, M., Perrin, A. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/>
9. "Child Anxiety Prevention Study: Impact on Functional Outcomes." (2017) *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* — Pella, J., Drake, K., Tein, J.-Y., & Ginsburg, G.
10. "The positive impact of social and emotional learning for kindergarten to eighth-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews." (2008) *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* — Payton, J., Weissberg, R.P., Durlak, J.A., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., Schellinger, K.B., & Pachan, M. <https://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PDF-4-the-positive-impact-of-social-and-emotional-learning-for-kindergarten-to-eighth-grade-students-executive-summary.pdf>
11. "Schools as a Setting for Promoting Positive Mental Health: Better Practices and Perspectives" (2010) *Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health* — Morrison, W., Peterson, P. [http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/upload/JCSH%20Best%20Practice\\_Eng\\_Jan21.pdf](http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/upload/JCSH%20Best%20Practice_Eng_Jan21.pdf)
12. *Academic Leader in Me Research*
  - a. Andersen (2011) St. John's University. *The Effects of Formal Leadership-Lessons on the Emergence of Positive Social-Leadership Skills of Pre-Kindergarten Students*
  - b. Baldwin, Lodico, Voegtle, Bruce, Martone (2012) The College of Saint Rose. *Leadership, Goal Setting, and Self-Regulation: An Action Research Study*
  - c. Bryant, N. (2016) Capella University. *Administrators and Principals and the Implementation Process of the Leader in Me Initiative*
  - d. Corcoran, Reily, & Ross (2014) John Hopkins University. *Achievement Outcomes of The Leader In Me (TLIM) Program*
  - e. Cummins (2015) University of Louisiana at Lafayette. *A Mixed Methods Study on The Leader in Me Process: How Does Fostering Student Leadership Capacity Influence Behavior, Efficacy, and Achievement?*
  - f. Evans (2014) Virginia Commonwealth University. *Making Leaders: Examining How Elementary School Students Develop an Understanding of Leadership and Show Emerging Leadership Tendencies*
  - g. The National Health Services of Scotland and the Fife Council (2015) *Improving Wellbeing in Fife: 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teenagers, People and Families*
  - h. Tidd (2016) Walden University. *Staff Perceptions of the Effect of The Leader in Me on Student Motivation and Peer Relationships in Elementary School*