



# Understanding Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

**FOUR WEEKS OF EASY ACTIVITIES FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS TO PRATICE MENTAL HEALTH SKILLS WITHIN THEIR CLASSROOMS.**

Week 1: Kindness, empathy, and gratitude

Week 2: Celebrating each other's differences

Week 3: Pride Month

Week 4: Everyone belongs and matters

## INTRODUCTION

Awareness and understanding of diversity, inclusion, and creating a belonging environment can support the achievement and well-being of all students. Students who do not see themselves reflected in what they are learning, in their classrooms, and in their schools become disengaged. Students who feel welcomed and accepted in their school, and see themselves reflected in the curriculum, are more likely to experience a greater sense of well-being and a higher level of academic achievement.

Discriminatory biases and systemic barriers such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination may prevent some students from reaching their full potential. Ensuring equity in schools stems from the primary principle that every student should have the opportunity to succeed personally and academically, regardless of background, identity, or personal circumstances ([Understanding Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan: Parent Fact Sheet](#)).

## KEY POINTS

- Inclusion improves learning outcomes and builds empathy
- Increased student connectedness promotes classroom engagement and school attendance and a positive attitude toward school and learning
- Practices to support a students' sense of mattering can enhance their self-confidence, self-esteem, and their belief that they can have a positive impact on others and their world around them
- Learning to recognize and celebrate how people are both the same and different helps students appreciate diversity and to respect and care for each other
- Avoiding gendered language in lesson plans and teaching resources can ensure that all students feel included and represented in the teaching material



## Weekly Announcements (Mental Health Monday)

### Week One Announcement:

Kindness, Empathy and Gratitude. Having empathy means we can share and understand the feelings of other people around us. It means we can try to put ourselves in someone else's position to imagine what they may be thinking or feeling. We try to relate to them. Empathy helps us see we are more alike than different! This week practice empathy by trying to understand the feelings and perspectives of others.

### Week Two Announcement:

This week, explore ways in which we can learn about, understand and celebrate each other's differences. Take some time to learn about the different cultures of your classmates. What food do they enjoy? What celebrations do they participate in?

### Week Three Announcement:

In June, many across Canada recognize Pride Month. It is a time when we celebrate the diversity of 2SLGBTQ+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning) communities, while acknowledging the history, the hardships endured, and the progress that has been made. You can show your support by participating in a Pride Parade or getting crafty with rainbow art or decorations.

### Week Four Announcement:

Everyone in our school is unique. What makes our school great is that it's a place where everyone belongs and matters. This week, play with someone new at recess, add a new member to your classroom group or talk to someone you don't usually talk to. How can you help someone feel included today?



## ACTIVITIES

- Walking in Your Shoes: Help students become more understanding and compassionate towards others [grades K-8]
- That's Me: Explore ways in which students can learn about and understand each other's similarities and differences, unique likes, interests, families, and cultures by doing this fun activity [grades 6-8]
- Adjectives About Me: Do this activity to help students learn about themselves and that they matter by describing their positive traits with help from their peers [grades K-8]
- The "I" In Image: Provide students with an opportunity to express and explain a personal choice and perspective, to hear and learn about others' views by completing this [grades K-8]
- Red: A Crayon's Story: From [welcomingschools.org](http://welcomingschools.org), will initiate a discussion with your class about stereotypes based on appearance (gender, race, ability). Student will explore their inner identities by creating a "Self-Crayon" [grades K-2]
- Gender Snowperson: Help students understand the differences between gender expression, gender identity, who you love, and sex assigned at birth by completing this activity. [grades 3-5]



## Book and/or Video Recommendations

- The Great Big Book of Families by Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith [Grades K-5]
- Families by Shelley Rotner and Sheila Kelly [Grades K-2]
- Except When They Don't by Laura Gehl [Grades K-2]
- George by Alex Gino [Grades 6-8]
- Books on Diversity: [Grades K-8]



### **For Educators Who Use Social Media**

- Tweet photos of your school community participating in activities
- Tweet at other classes or schools to challenge them to take part
- Tag your local health unit's School Team on Twitter @SW\_PublicHealth or @ML\_SchoolHealth so we can share what you are doing!

### **References**

- [Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusive Education, Government of Ontario](#)
- [Understanding Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan: Parent Fact Sheet](#)
- Growing Healthy Schools: Supporting Gender Inclusivity Middlesex-London Health Unit

