



# A guide to supporting mental wellness in Yukon schools





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## What is mental health?

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The **World Health Organization** defines mental health as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contributions to their community.



# Introduction

This guide outlines the Department of Education’s approach to supporting learner mental health and wellness in Yukon schools. It focuses on strengthening the conditions that help learners feel safe, supported, and ready to learn. When learners have the right tools, steady support, and positive environments from an early age, they are better able to manage stress and life’s challenges as they grow.

Schools play an important role in learner wellness. Learners do best when schools are safe, welcoming places, built on trusting relationships and a shared culture of care. This includes age-appropriate programs and proactive approaches that support learner wellbeing.

Supporting learner wellness is a shared responsibility. Families, communities, schools, and mental health professionals all have a role to play. Together, they form a connected support system that can respond to learners’ needs and help build long-term resilience.

The work outlined in this guide reflects ongoing efforts across all Yukon school authorities. New initiatives will be developed collaboratively with school authorities to support consistency across the territory, while respecting the unique strengths, priorities, and contexts of each school community. Each school authority can adapt this work to reflect local values and needs.

This guide provides a shared foundation for more meaningful, accessible, and inclusive supports across Yukon schools that supports flexible, culturally responsive approaches and long-term solutions that help all learners thrive.



**1 in 5** Canadians live with a mental illness<sup>1</sup>



**6,035** learners enrolled in Yukon schools for **2025–2026**



**47,170** people live in the Yukon as of **March 2025**

1 Mental Health Commission of Canada, Making the case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada



**Mental health and wellness play a vital role in shaping learner success – both in school and in life.** To help learners and educators thrive, learning environments must be safe, supportive and culturally responsive. These environments go beyond physical spaces. They include strong relationships, caring adults and systems that support each learner’s unique needs.

Research shows that early experiences have a lasting impact on mental health. One systematic review of existing studies on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) notes that “protective factors to reduce the impact of ACEs were cultural identity and connectedness, education, social support, and psychological resilience” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020).

Public Health, 2025  
Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma, 2021



**A definition of mental wellness in Forward Together:  
Yukon Mental Wellness Strategy**

“Mental wellness is a balance of mental, physical, and spiritual, and emotional. This balance is enriched as individuals have: purpose in their daily lives whether it is through education, employment, care-giving activities, or cultural ways of being and doing; hope for their future and those of the families that is grounded in a sense of identity, unique Indigenous values, and having a belief in spirit; a sense of belonging and connectedness within their families, to community, and to culture; and finally a sense of meaning and an understanding of how their lives and those of their families and communities are part of creation and a rich history.”

First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework, 2015  
First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework – Summary Report

# Current landscape

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Mental wellness in Yukon schools is part of a broader commitment to supporting the whole child – academically, socially and emotionally.

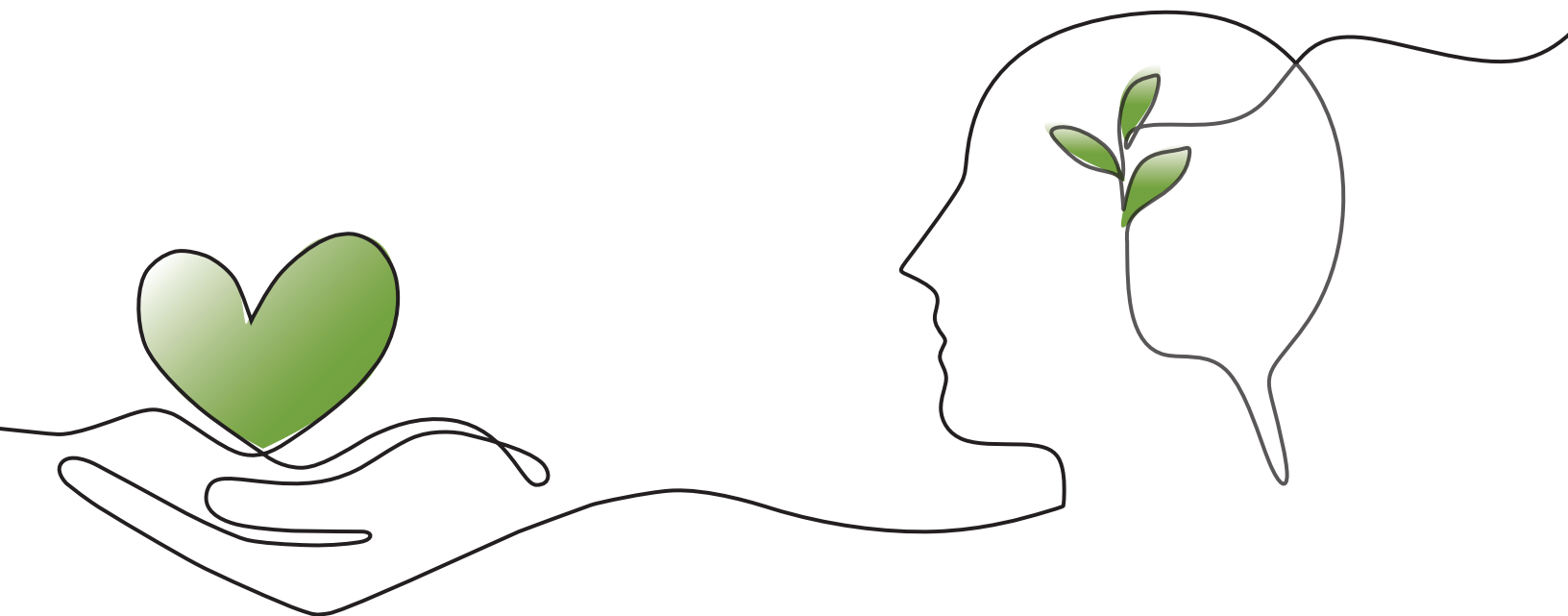
## Current trends in youth mental wellness

In recent years, the landscape of youth mental health and wellbeing has changed significantly. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with broader societal pressures and trends, have contributed to increased mental health challenges for many learners.



**Young people are particularly vulnerable to the disruptions the pandemic has caused, and many are being left behind in education, economic opportunities, health and well-being during a crucial stage of their development.**

Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 on Youth in Canada, Mental Health Commission of Canada



## Guiding reports and recommendations

This guide is grounded in work happening across the Yukon through a variety of government and non-government programs, services and organizations. Much of the work points to rising levels of anxiety, depression and stress among young people.

This guide reflects priorities identified in key reports, strategies and action plans. Together, these documents call for:

- Earlier access to help;
- Stronger supports in schools;
- More holistic, coordinated, accessible and culturally responsive approaches; and
- Better collaboration between schools, families, communities, and service providers.

They also emphasize that learners learn best when they feel safe, supported and connected, highlighting the need for inclusive, accessible and culturally safe services, especially for youth facing systemic barriers.

### Origins

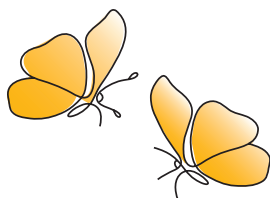


These foundational reports shaped the starting point for this work.

- Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly: Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education in the Yukon
- Forward Together: Yukon Mental Wellness Strategy
- Review of Inclusive and Special Education

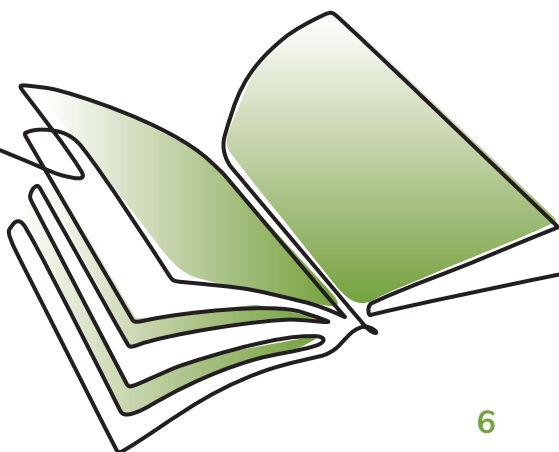
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### Concurrent initiatives

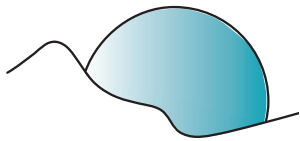


This guide aligns with and supports these active initiatives.

- Integrated Outcome Strategy for Yukon Learners
- Joint Education Action Plan
- Pathway to an Inclusive Education System in the Yukon (Forthcoming)



## Higher-level strategies, policies and plans

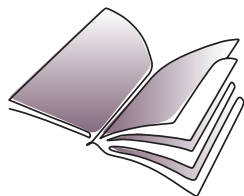


This guide builds on broader territorial frameworks underway providing direction on inclusion, wellbeing and systemic transformation.

- Breaking Trail Together
- LGBTQ2S+ Action Plan
- Putting People First
- Safe and Caring Schools Policy
- Sexual Orientation and - Gender Identity Policy
- Territorial Youth Strategy
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action
- Yukon Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy

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## Report recommendations



This guide works to address the reviews and reports of evidence-based recommendations focused on improving supports for youth in the Yukon.

- Communities of Inquiry Recommendations
- Yukon Child and Youth Advocate's
  - Review on School Attendance in Yukon: What is, What Could Be
  - Close to Home
  - I Am Not Okay, It's Not Okay
  - For Our Children: A Review of Systemic Racism in Yukon Education






# A system-wide approach

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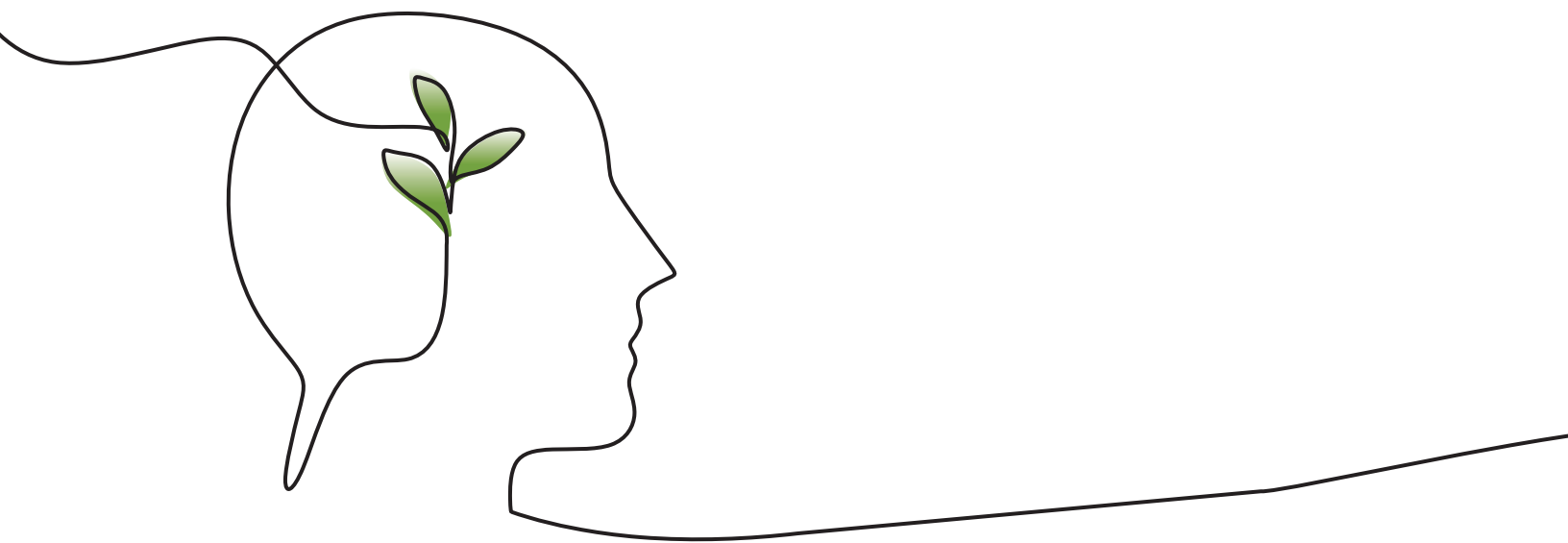
Supporting mental wellness in Yukon schools is grounded in the belief that every learner deserves to feel safe, supported and ready to learn.

A promotion, prevention and intervention approach is used, based on:

-  : **Promoting mental health;**
-  : **Preventing serious issues; and**
-  : **Interventions to improve accessibility, inclusivity, and cultural safety of services, especially for youth who may face additional barriers.**

This approach ensures the mental wellness programs, planning and care focus on addressing mental health challenges from an early age, lowering school-based risk factors related to mental illness, and promoting positive mental health in all learners. It aligns this guide with Forward Together: Yukon Mental Wellness Strategy and reflects the commitment to prioritizing mental wellness through proactive measures, early intervention and support for those in need.

Mental wellness is not a standalone initiative; it's a shared responsibility that connects classrooms, homes and communities. Using this approach means Yukon schools can support this shared responsibility and foster the connections necessary to support learners emotionally, socially and academically. The following pages provide an overview of the programs, planning and improvements in mental health care across the school system under three key areas:





### **Learner-centred mental wellness support**

Making direct services and supports available in schools to promote wellbeing, respond to mental health needs and connect learners and families with care.



### **Teaching for health and belonging**

Embedding mental health education into classroom learning and curriculum so learners gain lifelong skills to manage stress, build resilience and understand themselves and others.



### **Community connections**






Working closely with families, First Nations, mental health professionals and community organizations to create strong, connected supports for youth.



# Learner-centred mental wellness support

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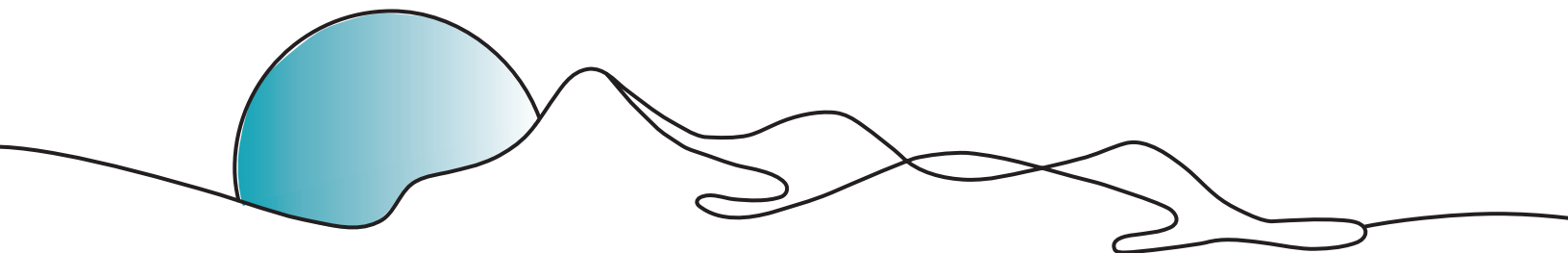
Schools play a key role in promoting mental wellness and supporting learners' emotional development. As learners navigate academic expectations, relationships and personal challenges, schools provide an important setting for early support and connections. The shared approach to learner mental wellness across all Yukon school authorities includes:

-  : **Creating school environments that foster belonging, safety and connection.**
-  : **Training school staff in developmentally responsive practices.**
-  : **Offering wellness programming tailored to different age groups.**
-  : **Supporting access to school counsellors and specialized mental health professionals.**
-  : **Building stronger connections between schools, families and community supports.**

This work is grounded in collaboration with educators, families, Yukon First Nations and health professionals. It reflects the growing understanding that learners' success depends on academic instruction in a supportive environment alongside consistent, accessible mental health and wellness supports.

## Mental health and wellness support staff in Yukon schools

Supporting learner mental health requires a team-based approach. In Yukon schools, a range of professionals work together to meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of learners. From teachers and school counsellors to school wellness specialists and new culturally grounded roles, each person contributes to a coordinated system of care.



The key school-based mental wellness supports and programs that promote learner wellbeing and ensure learners and families have access to the help they need include:

## School counsellors

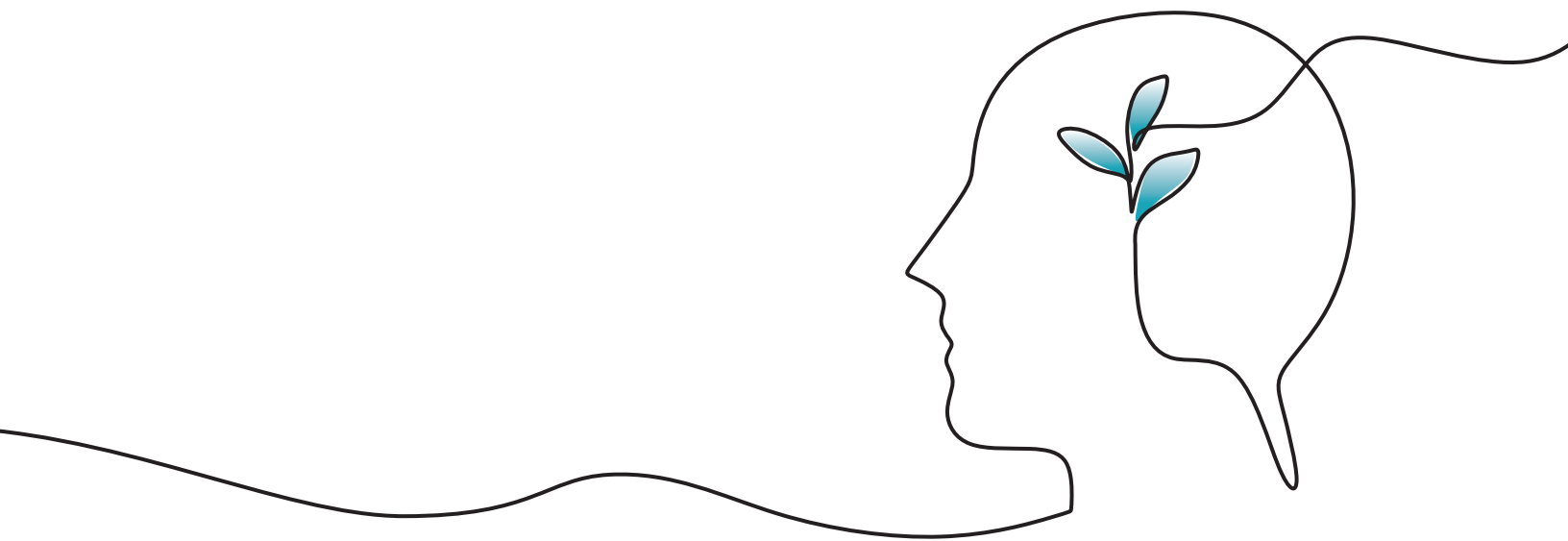
School counsellors are teachers who offer support with learners' personal, academic and social-emotional development. They support learners with:

- Personal development, helping learners to build social-emotional skills, life skills, decision-making abilities, make healthy choices and strengthen wellbeing.
- Academic support, assisting with goal setting, academic planning and exploring post-secondary or career pathways.

## School wellness specialists

School wellness specialists provide direct support to learners, families, educators and school communities. Their roles can vary depending on school needs and may include:

- Supportive counselling for learners facing social-emotional challenges.
- Needs assessments to better understand individual learner needs.
- Program development and consultation with school staff to address specific needs.
- Case management coordination and advocacy to connect families to resources and supports.
- Education and outreach on mental health topics for learners and staff.



## First Nation government wellness roles

In partnership with several First Nation governments, the Department of Education is working to develop First Nation wellness roles rooted in Indigenous worldviews and cultural knowledge. These roles aim to:

- Support the mental, emotional and cultural wellbeing of learners with a focus on Indigenous learners.
- Provide culturally grounded wellness programming.
- Build relationships with learners, families and school staff reflecting the unique needs, priorities and strengths of each community.
- Strengthen the presence of First Nation perspectives in school-based wellness.
- Connect families to appropriate community supports.

Each role is developed in close collaboration with First Nation governments to ensure it reflects the community's values, needs, and strengths.

## Clinical counsellors

Clinical counsellors are provided through the Department of Health and Social Services. They offer specialized clinical mental health services, including:

- Support for complex mental health needs or diagnosed conditions.
- Treatment planning and clinical counselling.
- Use of clinical assessment tools to support diagnosis and intervention.
- Services related to problematic substance use and addiction.



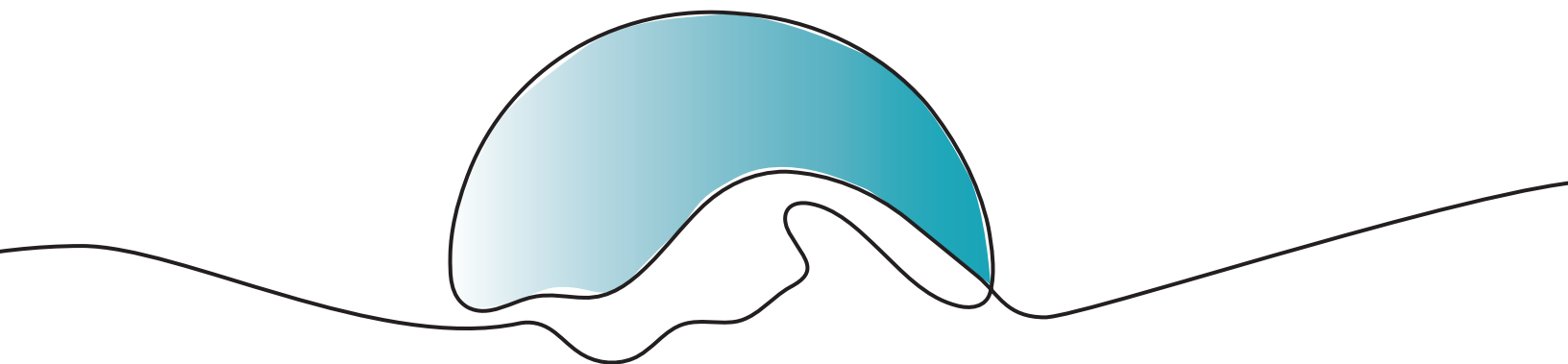
## Ready-to-Learn Schools

Ready-to-Learn Schools is an approach that helps educators understand how brain development, stress and life experiences affect how people learn, feel, and behave. It is based on the idea that children can only be ready to learn when they feel safe, calm and supported.

This approach:

- Helps learners understand how their brains work and how to manage emotions.
- Helps educators to respond with compassion and understanding rather than punishment.
- Encourages consistent, school-wide practices that support regulation and readiness.
- Focuses on long-term healing, not quick, short-term fixes.
- Recognizes the strength of cultural practices in building emotional healing, resilience and regulation.
- Builds stronger relationships between schools, learners, families, and community partners.

**Schools that have adopted the Ready-to-Learn approach support positive social change and help all learners – no matter their background or needs – feel understood, supported and ready to thrive.**



# Health and belonging

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Yukon’s curriculum supports learner mental wellness by embedding mental health education across subject areas and promoting a holistic approach to wellbeing.

## First Peoples’ Principles of Learning

A central part of this approach is recognizing the significance of First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing.

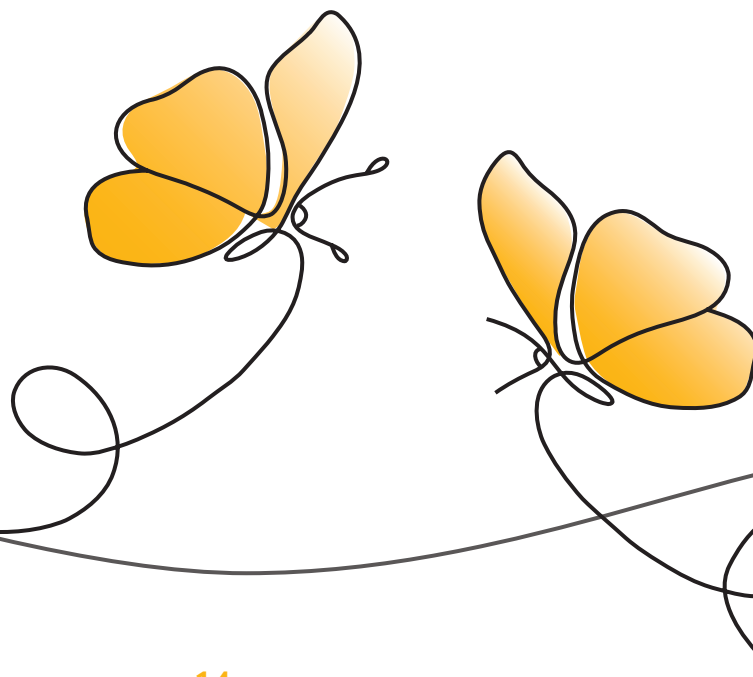
The **First Peoples’ Principles of Learning** guide educational practices in Yukon schools, supporting safe, inclusive learning experiences for learners that are reflective of the diverse cultural identities of learners. While based on British Columbia’s curriculum, Yukon’s kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum has the flexibility to reflect the local context of each community.

[First Nations Education Steering Committee - fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning/](https://fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning/)

## Cultural Inclusion Standards in all Schools

All Yukon schools follow the **Cultural Inclusion Standards in all Schools**, developed by the First Nations Education Commission.

The Department of Education has recently introduced the Accreditation of Yukon First Nations Cultural, Language and Traditional Knowledge Learning Policy, which gives Yukon First Nations governments full control to develop, deliver and assess accredited learning, enabling learners to earn up to 12 elective credits toward graduation through First Nation language and traditional knowledge programs.



Through ongoing collaboration with Yukon First Nations, the department is creating more culturally inclusive materials, resources and supports. Embedding these principles into the curriculum helps foster a sense of identity, belonging and resilience in learners – key protective factors that support mental wellness.

Mental health education is also a core part of the Physical and Health Education curriculum. Learners gain knowledge about emotional regulation, stress management, healthy relationships and decision-making. The curriculum emphasizes social-emotional learning, encouraging learners to develop self-awareness, empathy and coping skills.

Mental health concepts are further reinforced through cross-curricular competencies, such as personal awareness and responsibility, which support learners in understanding and managing their mental wellbeing. Key courses that have mental wellness embedded into the curriculum include:

- Physical and Health Curriculum (K-9)
- Physical and Health Education 10
- Career Life 10
- Active Living 11 and 12

The core competencies are self-reflected by learners and support learners understanding themselves, finding their purpose, embracing their individuality and connecting to others in healthy and purposeful ways.



# Community connections

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Mental wellness is not nurtured by schools alone – it is strengthened through deep and lasting partnerships with families, First Nations, community and cultural organizations and health professionals. These community connections create a shared network of care around learners, supporting continuous, culturally grounded and responsive mental health supports for the whole child.

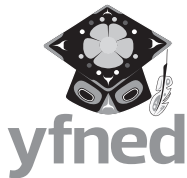
Schools cannot meet mental health needs in isolation. Collaborating with partners reduces stigma, builds trust and aligns work with the needs of learners, families, and communities. When schools and communities work together they foster a culture where wellness is understood as a shared responsibility.

## Community partnerships that support this work include:



Yukon First Nations governments have roles such as Community Education Liaison Coordinators (CELCs) and Education Support Workers (ESWs) and a range of cultural, therapeutic and academic supports working in schools to strengthen identity, connection and learner wellbeing.

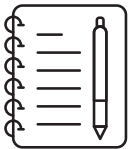
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The Yukon First Nation Education Directorate (YFNED) provides direct support to Indigenous learners through a range of roles within schools, including First Nation Education Advocates, Elders/Knowledge Holders, Junior Advocates and specialists who work closely with individual learners and their families. Additionally, YFNED extends support into communities through its Mobile Therapy Unit, which includes specialists and wellness teams. This initiative promotes an Indigenous, wrap-around and holistic approach to education by collaborating with school staff and community members.



Department of Education and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government are actively co-governing education on the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Traditional Territory. This work is grounded in spirit of Tr'ëhudè, a Hän word meaning “our way of life” or “how to go through life in a good way.” It supports learner wellness by being designed to fully integrate TH culture, history and language to improve educational outcomes for all learners at every stage of life.



The department collaborates with every Yukon First Nation government through the implementation of education agreements under the Joint Education Action Plan that includes specific priorities supporting the wellness of learners. The department remains committed to working in partnership to advance this important work.



## **The Department of Education works closely with the Department of Health and Social Services on several initiatives, including:**

- Supporting Community Wellness Plans developed by Yukon First Nations to meet the unique needs of their citizens.
- Coordinating with the Health Promotion Unit to align school curriculum and wellness messaging.
- Promotion of the Planet Youth initiative, a global model that uses local data to promote healthy behaviours and prevent substance use among youth.
- Partnering on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey, which helps schools and communities understand youth experiences and needs.
- Regularly engaging with partners through advisory groups, working groups and collaborative planning sessions to align supports with lived experience, community priorities and shared values.



**These partnerships are about co-creating safe, inclusive school environments where every learner feels they belong.**

**By working together from the ground up, sustainable systems of care can be created that reflect Yukon's communities and empower learners.**



# Walking together towards wellness

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As needs and understanding continue to evolve, this guide must grow and adapt alongside the people it serves. This means staying responsive, grounded in relationships and focused on what supports learners, families and school staff to feel safe, connected and able to thrive.

By working together, integrating wellness into everyday learning, and honouring cultural, community and individual strengths, it is possible to create a school experience where every learner feels supported, respected, competent and ready to succeed.

**Supporting mental wellness in schools is an ongoing, collaborative journey.**



## The work ahead will focus on:

**Working closely** with educators and mental health professionals to strengthen the strategies that create caring, supporting and inclusive learning environments.

**Building mental health awareness** across the education system to reduce stigma and increase understanding.

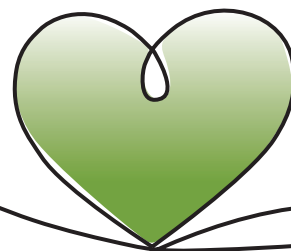
**Embedding wellness practices** into everyday programs, policies, and decision-making.

**Continuing to collaborate** with the Department of Health and Social Services on shared efforts, including the Integrated Service Delivery model to better meet the needs of children, youth, and families.

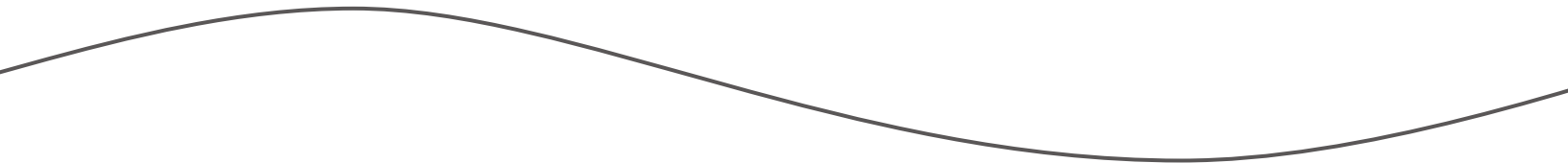
**Deepening partnerships** with school authorities, Yukon First Nations, and community organizations to make sure approaches reflect local priorities and strengths.

**Offering professional learning** that supports school staff in responding to diverse needs and promoting wellbeing.

**Using research, learner voice, and local data**, such as OurSchool survey and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey, to help guide decisions and improvements.







**Yukon**