

# CARING *and* SAFE SCHOOLS *in* ONTARIO

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

THROUGH PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE,

KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12





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Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant : *Bienveillance et sécurité dans les écoles de l'Ontario : La discipline progressive à l'appui des élèves ayant des besoins particuliers, de la maternelle à la 12<sup>e</sup> année.*

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website, at [www.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca).

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# 1

## *Introduction*

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### *The Purpose of This Resource Document*

**T**he Ontario Ministry of Education recognizes that all students require a caring and safe environment and individualized support in order to learn, develop their potential, and stay in school. Over the years, the ministry has taken a number of initiatives to assist schools in meeting these requirements. The present document is intended to serve as a practical resource for superintendents, principals, and vice-principals, to help them address issues of student behaviour both through instruction and interventions tailored to individual student needs and through ongoing efforts to build and maintain a caring and safe school culture.

The document sets out a framework that system and school leaders may use to strengthen schools' ability to provide a caring and safe environment, in which responses to behaviour issues are shaped by informed consideration of students' needs and circumstances. While the ideas and strategies outlined here are appropriate for use with all students, the focus of this document is on the particular circumstances of students with special education needs.

More specifically, this resource document is intended to:

- ◆ assist system and school leaders to promote and support a caring and safe school culture;
- ◆ provide information about appropriate strategies and resources to help system and school leaders address behavioural challenges for students, in particular students with special education needs.

There is a direct link between success in school and the school environment in which student learning takes place. Students are more motivated to do well and achieve their full potential in schools that have a positive school culture and one in which they feel safe and supported.

*(Safe Schools Action Team, 2008, p. 1)*

The investigations of the Safe Schools Action Team have confirmed that a safe and supportive environment for learning and working is one of the most important factors that influence the quality of student learning and achievement (Safe Schools Action Team, 2008).

Students who experience a positive school culture feel supported and accepted by peers and school staff and tend to develop a strong sense of school membership. Feelings of belonging enhance students' self-esteem and can contribute both directly and indirectly to improvements in academic and behavioural functioning and overall mental health. Students who feel accepted are more likely to develop strong literacy skills and make a positive contribution to the school culture and are less likely to commit infractions. Conversely, a low sense of school engagement in students appears to be correlated to a higher incidence of emotional and behavioural disorders (Canadian Public Health Association, 2003). This suggests that an approach to dealing with inappropriate student behaviour which enables students to feel supported and accepted at school may contribute to improved student learning and behaviour and help students stay in school.

Promoting positive behaviour through a caring and safe learning environment and an individualized approach to behaviour issues begins with system and school leaders, who set the tone for the system and schools. They bear the primary responsibility for working with teachers and other partners to create an environment in which individual students and adults are treated fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect. It is hoped that the ideas in this document will be helpful to them – and also to all staff, including special education resource teachers, to parents, and to other stakeholders.

Leading schools – as in any great organization – requires principals with the courage and capacity to build new cultures based on trusting relationships and a culture of disciplined inquiry and action.

*(Fullan, 2003)*

## Ministry Initiatives

■ The Ministry of Education has undertaken a number of initiatives to help schools build a culture of caring and address issues of safety and inappropriate behaviour in schools. In December 2004, the ministry established the Safe Schools Action Team and invested in a comprehensive, province-wide, bullying-prevention strategy. After widespread public consultation, the Safe Schools Action Team released *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan* in November 2005 and *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action* in June 2006. These two reports identified priorities for action and made recommendations to the ministry and school boards with respect to bullying prevention, progressive discipline, community and parental involvement, application of the Safe Schools Act, programs for suspended/expelled students, education and training, communication, and a Provincial Safe Schools Framework.

In addition, in December 2008, the Safe Schools Action Team released a further report – *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships* – calling for action to address serious issues such as gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment, and inappropriate sexual behaviour between students in schools.

The ministry itself consulted extensively on the safe schools provisions of the Education Act in order to develop legislative amendments and related policies and regulations that would address the questions of school safety and of how to respond constructively to challenging behaviour by students. The amendments that came into force on February 1, 2008, mandated a “progressive discipline” approach for addressing inappropriate behaviour, to enable schools to provide appropriate discipline while also ensuring that students have adequate opportunities to continue their education. These amendments also mandated the provision of professional supports, programming supports, and training for teachers and principals. Additional amendments, which came into force on February 1, 2010, ensure that all serious incidents that occur at school are reported to the principal, that parents of victims are made aware of such incidents, and that staff who work directly with students respond to incidents when they occur. (See Appendix 1 of Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145, “Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour” [October 19, 2009].)

The term “progressive discipline”, as defined in PPM No. 145, refers to “a whole-school approach that utilizes a continuum of prevention programs, interventions, supports, and consequences to address inappropriate student behaviour and to build upon strategies that promote and foster positive behaviours.” Specifically, this means that “When inappropriate behaviour occurs, disciplinary measures should be applied within a framework that shifts the focus from one that is solely punitive to one that is both corrective and supportive. Schools should utilize a range of interventions, supports, and consequences that are developmentally appropriate

and include learning opportunities for reinforcing positive behaviour while helping students to make good choices” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009g, p. 3).

This approach to discipline also requires principals and school boards to take into account a variety of mitigating and other factors when considering the suspension or expulsion of a student. The mitigating factors outlined in the amendments are as follows:

- ◆ The student does not have the ability to control his or her behaviour.
- ◆ The student does not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behaviour.
- ◆ The student’s continuing presence in the school does not create an unacceptable risk to the safety of any person.<sup>1</sup>

Other factors to be taken into account were also specified in the amendments, including:

- ◆ the student’s history;
- ◆ whether a progressive discipline approach has been used with the student;
- ◆ whether the activity for which the student may be or is being suspended or expelled was related to any harassment of the student because of his or her race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation or any other harassment;
- ◆ how the suspension or expulsion would affect the student’s ongoing education;
- ◆ the age of the student;
- ◆ in the case of a student for whom an Individual Education Plan (IEP) has been developed:
  - i. whether the behaviour was a manifestation of a disability identified in the student’s individual education plan;
  - ii. whether appropriate individual accommodation has been provided;
  - iii. whether the suspension or expulsion is likely to result in an aggravation or worsening of the student’s behaviour or conduct.

When addressing behavioural issues in schools, the focus should be on the interaction between students and their environment – on influences in the environment that may cause appropriate or inappropriate behaviour. More importantly, the focus should be on the creation of a caring and safe school culture that supports the teaching and ongoing reinforcement of skills that will enable students to choose and consistently demonstrate appropriate behaviour. The set-up for teaching and reinforcing these skills should be positive, nurturing, and inclusionary as opposed to negative, punitive, and exclusionary.

1. These factors must be considered while accommodations and supports are put in place.



## *Ontario School Board Initiatives*

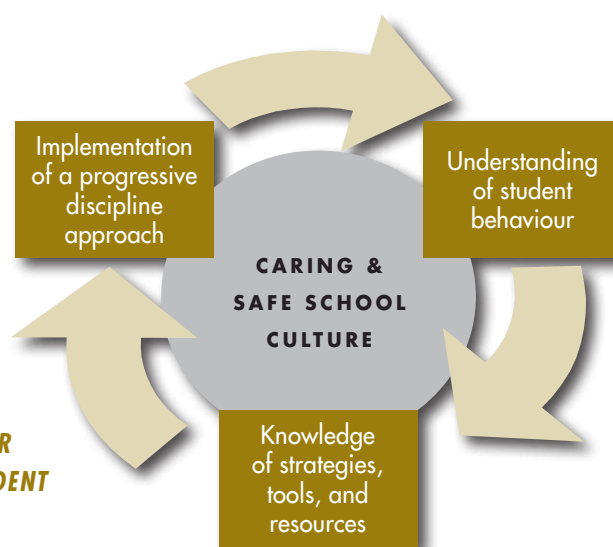
■ Ontario school boards have developed and implemented policies and procedures in accordance with the safe schools provisions of the Education Act, regulations under the act, and Ministry of Education requirements as set out in policy/program memoranda. These policies and procedures are publicly available on school boards' websites. School boards also provide training related to safe schools policies for administrators, teachers, and other staff members.

## *Initiatives in Other Jurisdictions*

■ A review of other jurisdictions indicates that a number of other countries and, in Canada, the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador, also have policies to build and maintain a caring and safe environment in schools. These policies call for the allocation of resources and the involvement of school staff and community members to develop and implement programs that promote school safety and a positive school climate. In some jurisdictions, multiple public services for children and youth play a role, including schools, mental health services, and the justice system. As well, most jurisdictions have provisions to address major issues such as bullying, harassment, violence, and the need for child protection.

## *Framework for Promoting Positive Student Behaviour*

■ The sample framework shown in Figure 1 depicts the components of a learning environment that is designed to promote student engagement and respond constructively to behavioural challenges.



**FIGURE 1. FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOUR**

At the centre of the framework is a “caring and safe school culture”. This document uses the term “school culture” in a way that encompasses the definition of “school climate” provided in the 2006 report of the Safe Schools Action Team – *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action* – that is, “the sum total of all of the personal relationships within a school”. The report goes on to say that “when these relationships are founded in mutual acceptance and inclusion, and modelled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm” (p. 6). A positive climate or, in the terminology of the present document, a “caring and safe school culture”, exists when all members of the school community demonstrate respect for others, kindness, fairness, and a sense of social responsibility in their behaviour and interactions – in other words, when all members feel safe, comfortable, and accepted.

To establish, maintain, and enhance a caring and safe system and school culture, school leaders need detailed, specific information about how all aspects of school life are perceived by students, school staff, parents, and community members. They use a variety of assessment instruments and strategies to identify strengths and areas where improvements are needed.

The other components of the framework – “understanding of student behaviour”, “knowledge of strategies and resources”, and “implementation of a progressive discipline approach” – represent means for addressing behavioural issues to ensure the best possible educational outcome for all students.

- 1. *Understanding of student behaviour:*** To meet student needs, support student success, and respond appropriately to the full range of student behaviour, system and school leaders need to acquire information about a variety of factors that influence students’ achievement and behaviour. They need knowledge of the types of intellectual and emotional challenges students may face. They need to know what signs to look for in student behaviour and how to interpret what they observe. They also need knowledge of circumstances in the student’s school, home, and community environments that may have a bearing on the student’s behaviour.
- 2. *Knowledge of strategies, tools, and resources:*** System and school leaders need to identify appropriate strategies, tools, and resources they can use to address specific challenges and meet identified needs.
- 3. *Implementation of a progressive discipline approach:*** System and school leaders need to identify a range of appropriate actions to be taken, as well as who will plan and carry out the actions, and what the time frame will be. They also need to plan for ongoing monitoring, reflection, and adjustment, in order to identify further needed improvements and integrate them into their implementation processes.

As recommended by Freire (1985, 1987) reflection and adjustment are embedded in the framework so that lessons learned are incorporated into the implementation process on a continuing basis.

### *Preview of the Rest of This Document*

■ In the material that follows, each chapter deals with one component of the framework described in Figure 1, beginning with the topic of school culture. In Chapter 2, “Promoting Positive Behaviour Through a Caring and Safe School Culture”, the discussion focuses on the characteristics of a caring and safe culture, and on procedures and indicators that can be used by system and school leaders to assess the culture in their schools and plan for needed improvements.

Chapter 3, “Understanding Student Behaviour”, discusses a variety of factors that influence student behaviour and that may contribute to inappropriate and/or challenging behaviour.

Chapter 4, “Investigating Strategies, Tools, and Resources”, identifies a wide variety of approaches and sources of information that school leaders can draw on in planning how to meet identified needs.

Chapter 5, “Addressing Behavioural Issues Through a Progressive Discipline Approach”, focuses on how to organize and manage a response to the identified behavioural issues and needs and offers some sample assessment and planning tools that system and school leaders can adapt to their own circumstances.

The appendix provides a blank sample planning template that school boards may find useful. In addition, a glossary is included in the document to provide explanations of a variety of terms used in the document that may not be familiar to all readers.

# 2

## ***Promoting Positive Behaviour Through a Caring and Safe School Culture***

The goal of a caring and safe school strategy is to encourage school practices that model and reinforce socially responsible and respectful behaviours so that learning and teaching can take place in a safe and caring environment. *(Mather, 2001)*

Participating in and contributing to a safe, respectful and positive learning environment is both the right and responsibility of children and youth, their parents/caregivers, school personnel and all community members. Schools, acting in partnership with their communities, can create and maintain these environments that foster a sense of belonging, enhance the joy of learning, honour diversity and promote respectful, responsible and caring relationships. *(Positive Learning Environments in Schools, 2000, p. 2)*

### ***Guiding Principles***

**T**he focus on ensuring a caring and safe school culture is based on the belief that all students deserve a learning environment in which they *are* safe – and *feel* safe – and in which they feel welcomed, respected, and inspired to meet high expectations for learning (Safe Schools Action Team, 2008, p. 8). This belief informs the guiding principles that are the basis for government and ministry initiatives on caring and safe schools . The principles are as follows:

- ◆ Safety is a precondition for learning.
- ◆ Every student is entitled to learn to the best of his or her ability.
- ◆ Every student is entitled to a safe and caring learning environment.
- ◆ Every student is entitled to learn in an environment free from harassment and violence.
- ◆ A quality education is about more than academic achievement – it is about the development of the whole person.
- ◆ The commitment to safe schools is a shared responsibility of government, school board trustees and administrators, principals, teachers, support staff, students, parents, police, and other community partners.

*(Safe Schools Action Team, 2006, p. 5)*

### ***A Caring and Safe School Culture – What Does It Look Like?***

■ Building a caring and safe school culture begins with knowing what a caring and safe school culture looks like. A caring and safe school is a place where all partners – students, staff, parents, and community members – treat others fairly, with respect and kindness, and act in a socially responsible way towards all members of the school community, including students with special education needs. It is an inclusive community where diversity is affirmed within a framework of common values, and where all members participate in decision making and cooperate to promote the well-being of all. Such a community is characterized by:

- ◆ caring and cooperative relationships;
- ◆ a framework of common values that includes:
  - ◇ respect for democratic values, rights, and responsibilities;
  - ◇ respect for cultural diversity;
  - ◇ respect for law and order;
  - ◇ respect for individual differences;
- ◆ clear and consistent behavioural expectations;
- ◆ appropriate and positive role modelling by staff and students.

**Equity:** A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences. *(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009d, p. 4)*

**Inclusive education:** Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

*(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009d, p. 4)*

School and system leaders recognize that a caring, safe, respectful, and positive learning environment is the foundation of successful and high-performing schools and that a commitment to equity in student outcomes is a key component in creating and maintaining a culture of caring in the school. As the *Draft K–12 School Effectiveness Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009c) emphasizes, “The Ontario education system has a mandate to reach every student and to bring about success for all regardless of personal circumstances. In a truly equitable system, factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status do not limit students from achieving ambitious outcomes or truncate their life chances. In fact, barriers are removed as schools assume responsibility for creating the conditions to ensure success. The basic premise of equity is fairness and the belief in the moral imperative of schools to educate all students successfully. An equitable system, therefore, empowers all students to achieve” (p. 3).

A positive school culture is one in which individuals are trusted, respected, and involved, where there is collaboration, high expectations, mutual trust, caring, and support for all individuals. They work cooperatively; intolerance does not exist, nor are students harassed or threatened. Students feel that adults care for them as a group and as individuals. High expectations exist so that students are successful both academically and socially (Erb, as cited in Bucher & Manning, 2003; Stader, 2000; and Dodd, 2000). Furthermore, as Sautner (2001) suggests, caring for students must be given the same kind of consideration that we give to our efforts to ensure their safety.

### ***The Influence of School Culture on Student Learning and Behaviour***

■ The rationale for a caring and safe school culture is confirmed in research. As DeWit, McKee, Fjeld, and Karioja (2003) have found, a positive school culture is linked to students’ sense of belonging and acceptance, which is further linked to improved academic and behavioural outcomes. In addition, the authors found that social and physical aspects of a school can positively affect student outcomes.

Other studies, including a variety of ministry surveys, also emphasize the contribution of a positive learning environment to student success. For example, *The Early School Leavers: Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement From Secondary School – Final Report* (Community Health Systems Resource Group, The Hospital for Sick Children, 2005) confirms that a positive school culture is a key protective factor for encouraging youth to stay in school, as do

the *Draft K–12 School Effectiveness Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009c), the findings in current and longitudinal research, and the recent *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* (McMurtry & Curling, 2008).

There is evidence that recent ministry and school initiatives to support a caring and safe school culture have had a positive effect on student learning. According to findings in the *Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy* (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008), “there has been an increased focus on a caring school culture at the secondary level through the Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy”. For example, the report states that in one school, the school motto, “‘Take care of yourself, take care of each other, take care of this place’, influenced the behaviour of staff in all of their interactions with students, whether in the classroom or in the hallways” (p. 26).

The report confirms that in many schools teachers have also shown greater awareness of the out-of-school challenges – such as poverty, hunger, and insecure or unsafe living environments – that many students face (ibid., pp. 26–27).

The report also notes, however, that “there is still a significant variation in the extent to which schools have been successful in establishing a school-wide culture of caring and community” (ibid., p. 26) and that work still remains to be done in many schools to provide an optimal learning environment for all students.

The discussion that follows focuses on this last point by suggesting ways in which school leaders can determine the particular needs of their school in order to build on existing strengths and address areas where improvement is needed.

### ***Assessing School Culture***

■ Before schools take action to build and/or strengthen a caring and safe school culture, they need to get an accurate picture of their existing school culture.

Assessment strategies such as cultural scans, surveys, or audits can help schools and systems understand and describe current school cultures while identifying areas for improvement and desired results. Assessment tools may offer a series of questions to help assess school culture with regard to a variety of characteristics. Because responses to surveys and other types of assessment will differ depending on who completes them, it is important to ensure that representatives from all sectors of the school and school community participate in assessment activities. There is much information to be gained by seeking out multiple perspectives. For example, to get an accurate picture of the school culture, it is essential to gather data from students, since research about bullying suggests that adults in a school do not witness the majority of this student behaviour.

Assessments may reveal areas of concern – “gaps” – that school leaders were previously unaware of, and this information will provide a useful starting point for rethinking practices in these areas. For example, if student responses indicate that students are reluctant to report incidents of bullying and harassment, school leaders will know that they need to identify specific barriers to student reporting and develop procedures and protocols to address them.

Examples of assessment instruments include the following:

- ◆ ***school climate surveys***: Sample surveys for students, teachers, and parents have been developed by the ministry and are available online. The surveys are designed to assess the school’s effectiveness in promoting equity and ensuring the safety of teachers and students.
- ◆ ***cultural audits***: Interviews and group discussions can be used to help schools determine to what extent the goals identified in the school’s mission statement and safety and equity policies are achieved in practice.
- ◆ ***action research***: An inquiry process in the field, involving a group of educators or all members of the school community, can be used to assess the effectiveness of specific strategies for ensuring a caring and safe school culture.

School culture may be assessed using one or a combination of the strategies outlined above. Whatever strategy or strategies they use, schools will need to identify specific attributes – or indicators – of a caring and safe school culture in order to determine which are present in their school, and to what degree. It is important to invite responses from a variety of school stakeholders – including parents, students, staff, and community members – in order to reach agreement on the values and beliefs that are essential to a caring and safe school and to gain an accurate picture of what is working well and where improvements are needed.

The checklist provided in Figure 2 identifies some indicators that system and school leaders may find useful for assessing school culture. (The indicators can be assessed on a sliding scale – for example, as true or applicable “rarely, sometimes, or always”.) The list is not intended to be exhaustive.



## **FIGURE 2. A CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSING SCHOOL CULTURE**

- All members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted.
- The learning environment is healthy, safe, and orderly.
- The school atmosphere is positive, friendly, and welcoming.
- Morale among students and staff is high.
- Teachers, students, and parents feel that the environment is favourable to learning.
- Diversity is acknowledged, accepted, and respected.
- The school mission or vision promotes student achievement.
- There are high expectations for all students.
- Students have opportunities to enhance their self-esteem and develop respect for themselves and others.
- Expectations for student behaviour are clear and effectively communicated, and students are supported in their efforts to meet those expectations.
- School leaders actively promote initiatives to strengthen instructional skills and techniques.
- The quality of classroom instruction is consistently high.
- Teachers receive recognition and support for their contribution to the students and the school programs.
- The value of teamwork is recognized, and responsibilities are shared.
- Relationships and interactions between students and between students and teachers are positive and characterized by mutual respect.
- Community involvement in school activities is welcomed and proactively sought.
- Parents are welcomed into the school through meaningful involvement as partners in the learning process.
- School leaders encourage risk taking, individual initiative, and leadership growth.
- Mistakes are seen as an opportunity for learning.
- Consequences for challenging student behaviour are appropriate and are applied fairly.

In addition to the indicators in the checklist, surveys need to include indicators such as the following, which are of particular relevance to students with special education needs:

- Programs and other supports are in place to enable staff to teach and reward the skills and attitudes that promote a caring and safe school.
- The physical environment of the school and classrooms is designed to ensure students' safety and promote student engagement and emotional well-being.
- Mechanisms are in place for identifying the needs of individual students and matching them to available and/or potential strategies and resources for meeting those needs.

- ❑ Students with special education needs are included, welcomed, and valued in the school.
- ❑ Staff and parents are knowledgeable about the types of challenges faced by students with special education needs.
- ❑ School leaders and staff understand the concerns of parents of students with special education needs and work collaboratively with them.

Finally, system and school leaders need to assess both system and school cultures to determine whether the necessary conditions for creating positive change are present. Attributes of a culture that is likely to be favourable to initiatives for positive change include the following:

System and school leaders demonstrate:

- ◆ commitment to protection of key values;
- ◆ willingness to involve stakeholders in decision making;
- ◆ willingness to provide tangible support for constructive initiatives;
- ◆ appreciation and recognition of effort and achievement;
- ◆ appreciation of tradition.

All partners demonstrate:

- ◆ a spirit of collegiality;
- ◆ trust and confidence in leaders and colleagues;
- ◆ high expectations for self and others;
- ◆ willingness to experiment;
- ◆ willingness to reach out to their knowledge base;
- ◆ commitment to honest, open communication;
- ◆ a capacity for caring, celebration, and humour.

*(Adapted from Saphier & King, 1985, p. 33)*

## ***Building a Caring and Safe School Culture***

■ Once schools have a thorough understanding of their existing culture, they can undertake the process of addressing areas that need improvement.

### **STEPS IN IMPLEMENTATION**

The steps in implementation to build and maintain a caring and safe school culture<sup>2</sup> include:

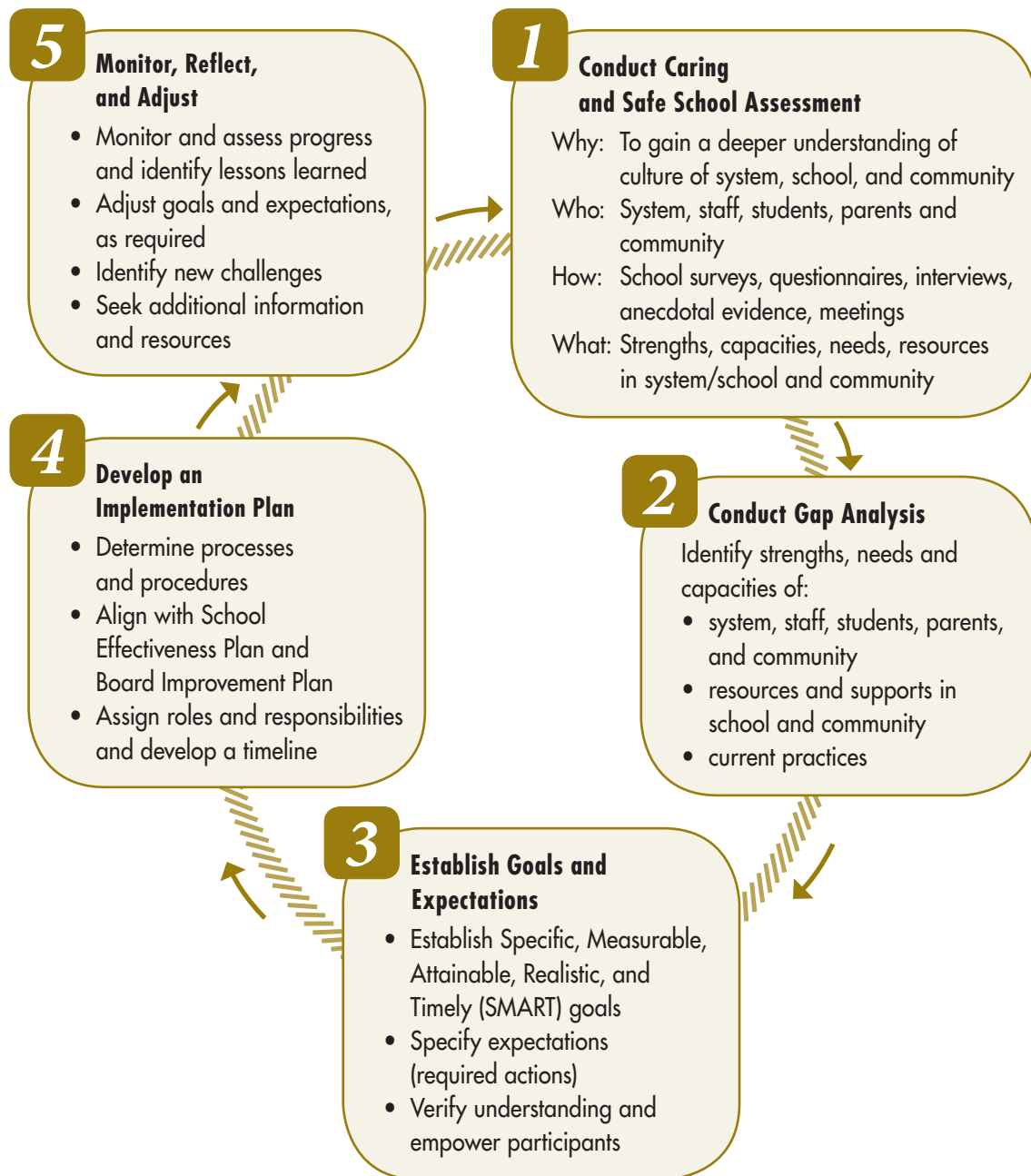
- ◆ identifying needs;
- ◆ setting goals;

2. School boards may find it helpful to integrate their initiatives to address school culture and student behaviour with their implementation of the draft policies *K–12 School Effectiveness Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009c) and *K–12 Board Improvement Plans Should Improve Teaching, Leading, and Learning* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b).

- ◆ outlining actions to be taken to achieve the goals;
- ◆ identifying who will do what;
- ◆ establishing timelines;
- ◆ monitoring and assessing progress in order to identify further needed actions.

Figure 3 illustrates a framework that school leaders could use to guide their implementation process.

**FIGURE 3. SAMPLE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**



## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN IMPLEMENTATION

A caring and safe school culture is built through a collaborative process that involves all stakeholder groups – system and school leaders, school staff, students, parents, and community members. The roles and responsibilities of these partners include but are not limited to the following.

### *System and School Leaders:*

- ◆ lead the planning and implementation process;
- ◆ foster a culture that is favourable to change;
- ◆ maintain communication with all stakeholders about goals, plans, and progress;
- ◆ lead by example, by modelling attitudes and behaviours consistent with the principles and practices of caring and safe schools;
- ◆ empower all partners – but especially students – to become involved in setting goals, planning, and participating in implementation initiatives.

### *School Staff:*

- ◆ participate in the planning and implementation process, taking on roles and responsibilities as team leaders and/or members as required;
- ◆ maintain communication about progress with system and school leaders, students, parents, and community members;
- ◆ model attitudes and behaviours that contribute to a caring and safe school culture by valuing and demonstrating respect for all students, including students with special education needs;
- ◆ take responsibility for the well-being of all students, including students with special education needs;
- ◆ empower students by ensuring opportunities for them to participate in making decisions, setting goals, planning, and carrying out plans.

### *Students:*

- ◆ contribute to information gathering by responding to surveys and participating in action research;
- ◆ participate in planning and goal setting by sharing ideas during classroom and school-wide consultations;
- ◆ demonstrate appreciation of and respect for diversity;
- ◆ demonstrate commitment to the well-being of the school community by cooperating and participating in character development programs, problem-solving processes, and restorative circles;
- ◆ demonstrate willingness to take responsibility for their own actions and learn from their mistakes;
- ◆ advocate for themselves and others.

*Parents and Community Members:*

- ◆ respond to surveys and share information specific to their child's strengths and needs;
- ◆ participate in planning and implementation by sharing ideas during community-wide consultations;
- ◆ help identify and mobilize resources in the community to support student learning;
- ◆ maintain ongoing communication with school personnel and school-community associations;
- ◆ demonstrate appreciation of and respect for the diversity of the school community;
- ◆ model attitudes and behaviours that contribute to a caring and safe culture in both the school and the broader community.

# 3

## *Understanding Student Behaviour*

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### *What Do You Need to Know?*<sup>3</sup>

**A** key responsibility of schools is to recognize the particular needs of individual students, including the complex and additional challenges faced by some students with special education needs, and to find ways of meeting those needs. An important measure of a caring and safe school is its ability to identify the range of needs of its students and determine how they influence student behaviour.

Sometimes students express their needs through challenging behaviour. The 2008 amendments to the Education Act require principals and school boards to use a progressive discipline approach in dealing with such behaviour and to take into account a variety of mitigating and other factors when determining consequences. If system and school leaders, as well as teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, are to respond appropriately and effectively to behavioural issues, they need to understand why inappropriate behaviour occurs and the messages students are communicating through their actions.

Some behaviour effectively meets the needs of the student, reflects the student's interaction with the environment, and is understood and considered appropriate by others. Other behaviour may be ineffective but may occur because it is a student's best available strategy for interacting with the environment and having his or her needs met.

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3. Much of this section is drawn from *Effective Educational Practices for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a), pp. 70–71.

Those seeking to understand student behaviour in the learning environment will find it helpful to keep in mind the following facts:

- ◆ **Behaviour occurs in a context.**
- ◆ **Behaviour is learned.**
- ◆ **Behaviour serves a function for the individual.**
- ◆ **Behaviour can be changed over time.**

*(Surrey Place Centre, 2008, p. 7)*

To manage behaviour effectively, educators need to consider not just the behaviour itself – what the student is doing – but also the underlying cause(s) of the behaviour. If educators focus only on what the student is doing, and try to eliminate the behaviour, they may find that another inappropriate behaviour arises in its place, because the underlying need has not been met. It is important to remember that inappropriate behaviour is usually a response to something in the student's environment and is an attempt to communicate a need, rather than being deliberately aggressive or purposefully negative.

Behaviour can be understood differently from various perspectives and within a variety of contexts.

***a. Definitions of behaviour are variable and may be influenced by subjective factors.***

What is identified as inappropriate or challenging behaviour may vary depending on who initiates the behaviour, when and where it occurs, and the perspective from which it is viewed. Adults often interpret behaviour from the perspective of their own life experiences and current circumstances. These perspectives affect the observer's expectations for the student. Factors that may influence how a person perceives behaviour include the following:

- ◆ personal childhood experiences
- ◆ cultural background
- ◆ school policies
- ◆ the person's relationship with the student

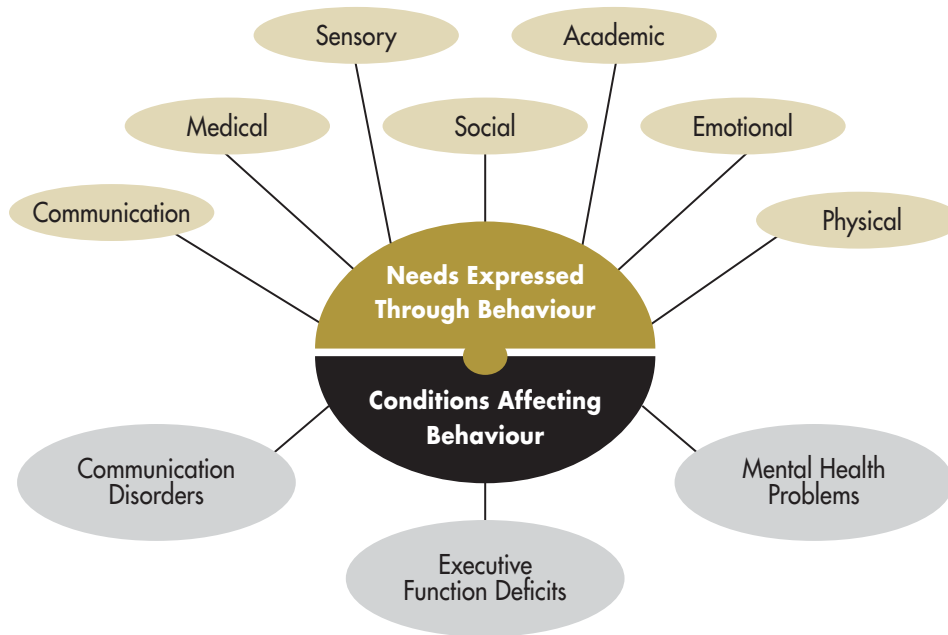
***b. Behaviour is student and situation dependent.***

It is essential to match our expectations for a student's behaviour to the unique circumstances of the student. For example, our expectations for a student who is unaware of the inappropriateness of a specific behaviour would be different from our expectations for a student who is aware, and we would adapt our response accordingly. Similarly, factors such as the age of the student and the behaviour of the student in other situations or settings will influence decisions about what is considered acceptable behaviour.

## Specific Conditions Affecting Behaviour

■ Students who are identified as having special education needs may manifest an array of behaviours in response to demands, stimuli, and relationships in the school environment. These behaviours can indicate a need in the communication, sensory, academic, physical, medical, social, or emotional areas, or in a combination of these areas (Barkley, 1990; Gerber, 1993; Lyon, 1994; Rourke, 1995; Nelson, Benner, & Rogers-Adkinson, 2003; Pinborough-Zimmerman, Satterfield, Miller, et al., 2007).

**FIGURE 4. NEEDS AND TYPES OF CONDITIONS AFFECTING STUDENT BEHAVIOUR**



Researchers, educators, and professionals have identified three broad categories of challenges that students may experience, singly or in combination – communication disorders, executive function deficits, and mental health problems. Information on these three areas is provided below, in both discussion and chart form. (Figures 5 through 8, on the following pages, outline specific “look-fors” and strategies educators can use when working with students whose behaviour is affected by these three types of challenges.)



## ***Communication Disorders***

■ A communication disorder is any disorder and/or delay within the scope of practice for a speech-language pathologist and/or audiologist, including but not limited to the following: speech-language disorders, hearing impairment, vertigo, tinnitus, swallowing, reading and writing disorders, and cognitive disorders (Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, 2005b).

### **Common Communication Disorders in Students**

- Articulation disorders
- Voice problems
- Stuttering
- Language difficulties

*(Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, 2005b, p. 1)*

Communication disorders in school-age children are often misdiagnosed as learning disabilities or behavioural problems, and can be very difficult to treat in later years. Research confirms a direct relationship between language disorders and emotional and behaviour disorders. Students with behavioural problems are ten times more likely than other students to have language disorders (Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, 2005b). Research also confirms that reading and math deficits co-occur in students with emotional and behavioural disorders and language deficits (Getty & Summy, 2006). Communication affects school success in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, and learning (Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, n.d.) and plays a significant role in social relationships.

### **Why do social relationships at school suffer when a student has a communication disorder?**

- The student does not understand information that is communicated or cannot express what he or she wants.
- Difficulty in understanding information about causes and consequences may interfere with the student's ability to follow everyday routines.
- Friendship, which is based on ability to share, is hindered by weak language skills.
- The student can become so frustrated by a lack of understanding or inability to communicate effectively that he/she misbehaves.
- The student often fails to realize that the message has been misunderstood, or the student may be so lost that asking for assistance is impossible.

**FIGURE 5. COMMUNICATION DISORDERS: INDICATORS AND STRATEGIES**

*Please note: The information in Figures 5, 6, and 7 is not exhaustive. It provides general knowledge to support understanding in these areas.*



## *Executive Function Deficits*

■ The term “executive function” is used to describe a set of cognitive processes that help students connect past experiences with present actions. Students use executive function when they perform such activities as planning, organizing, strategizing, and paying attention to and remembering details. Executive function also enables students to manage their emotions and monitor their thoughts in order to work more efficiently and effectively (Guare & Dawson, 2004).

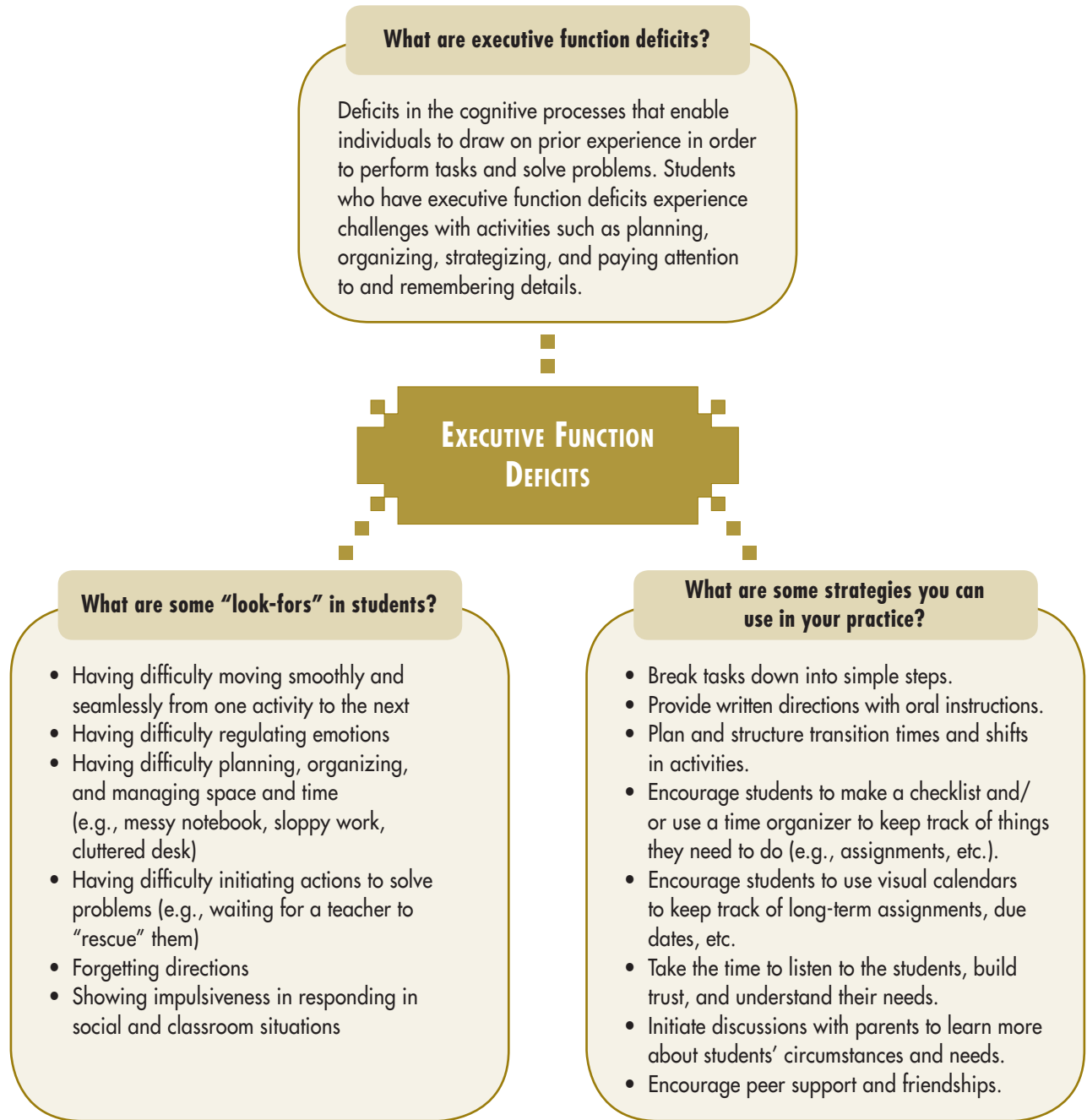
According to Brown (2006, p. 39), there are six clusters of cognitive functions that are affected by executive functions:

1. *Activation*: organizing, prioritizing, and activating to work
2. *Focus*: focusing, sustaining, and shifting attention to tasks
3. *Effort*: regulating alertness, sustaining alertness, and achieving appropriate speed in execution
4. *Emotion*: managing frustration and regulating emotions
5. *Memory*: utilizing working memory and accessing recall
6. *Action*: monitoring and self-regulating behaviour.

Students with executive function deficits have difficulty with planning, organizing, and managing time and space. They also show weakness with working memory, which is an important tool in guiding one’s actions. Problems with executive function may become evident when a student is:

- ◆ planning a project;
- ◆ comprehending how much time a project will take to complete;
- ◆ telling a story (orally or in writing);
- ◆ attempting to communicate details in an organized, sequential manner;
- ◆ applying mental strategies involved in memorizing and retrieving information from memory;
- ◆ initiating activities or tasks;
- ◆ generating ideas independently;
- ◆ retaining information while doing something with it.

**FIGURE 6. EXECUTIVE FUNCTION DEFICITS: INDICATORS AND STRATEGIES**



## Mental Health Problems

■ According to Children’s Mental Health Ontario (2002), one in five children and youths in Ontario will struggle with his or her mental health. More than 500,000 young people in Ontario suffer from a diagnosable mental health problem, such as anxiety, that may manifest itself in behaviour such as bullying or an eating disorder.

According to Statistics Canada (Health Canada, 2002), teenagers and young adults aged fifteen to twenty-four experience the highest incidence of mental disorders of any age group in Canada. Research has shown that:

- ◆ as many as one in five teenagers have experienced a major mental disorder (*McGee, Feehan, Williams, et al., 1990, as cited on Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA] website*);
- ◆ mental health problems, including serious mental illness, are more likely to emerge between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four than at any other stage of life (*Canadian Psychiatric Association, 1993, as cited on CMHA website*);
- ◆ depression, stress, suicide, and eating disorders are issues of concern for teens; and fear, embarrassment, peer pressure, and stigma are barriers to getting help (*Canadian Psychiatric Association, 1993, as cited on CMHA website*).

It is important to distinguish between mental illness and more common mental health problems.<sup>4</sup> The term “mental illness” refers to a diagnosable condition that usually requires medical treatment. It encompasses a range of psychiatric and emotional problems of varying degrees of intensity and duration that may recur from time to time. Major mental illnesses include mood, psychotic, and anxiety disorders. The most common mental illnesses among children and youth (to age seventeen) are anxiety disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity, conduct disorder, depression, and substance abuse (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2009, p. 13).

Some challenges students with mental illness may face include the following:

- ◆ **Screening out environmental stimuli** – an inability to block out sounds, sights, or odours that interfere with focusing on tasks
- ◆ **Sustaining concentration** – restlessness, shortened attention span, distractibility, difficulty remembering oral directions
- ◆ **Maintaining stamina** – limited energy, leading to difficulty in putting in a full day in school and/or difficulty in combating drowsiness caused by medications
- ◆ **Handling time pressures and multiple tasks** – difficulty managing assignments, meeting deadlines, and prioritizing tasks
- ◆ **Interacting with others** – difficulty getting along, fitting in, chatting with fellow students, and reading social cues

4. This discussion is adapted from Canadian Mental Health Association (n.d.), “Mental Problems and Mental Illness”, [http://www.cmha.ca/highschool/t\\_intro3.htm](http://www.cmha.ca/highschool/t_intro3.htm).

**FIGURE 7. MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS: INDICATORS AND STRATEGIES**

**What are mental health problems?  
What is mental illness?**

**Mental health problems**

Mental and emotional dysfunctions that affect a person's ability to enjoy life and deal with everyday challenges such as making choices and decisions, adapting to and coping in difficult situations, or talking about one's needs and desires. Mental health problems range from serious mental illnesses (see below) to more common, everyday struggles and problems, often arising in response to stress, that most people experience from time to time.

**Mental illness**

The term describes a variety of psychiatric and emotional problems that vary in intensity and duration, and may recur from time to time, including mood, psychotic, and anxiety disorders. It refers to a diagnosable condition that usually requires medical treatment.

**What are some common signs  
of mental illness?**

- Marked changes in personality
- Confused thinking
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Strange ideas or delusions
- Excessive fears, worries, and anxiety
- Prolonged feelings of irritability or sadness
- Significant changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Suicidal thoughts or remarks
- Extreme highs and lows in mood
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Excessive anger or hostility
- Paranoid behaviour
- Social withdrawal
- Irrational fears

**Mental Health  
Problems**

**What are some "look-fors" in students?**

- Problems concentrating, making decisions, or remembering things
- Missed deadlines, delays in completing assignments, poor quality work, poor exam grades
- Low morale
- Disorganization in completing school work
- Frequent complaints or evidence of fatigue or unexplained pains
- Decreased interest or involvement in class topics or academic endeavours in general
- Frequent absences or consistent late arrivals

**What are some strategies you  
can use in your practice?**

- Take steps to be informed about mental illness.
- Be supportive and understanding.
- Take the time to listen to the students, build trust, and understand their needs.
- Initiate discussions with parents to learn more about students' circumstances and needs.
- Work with students and parents to determine appropriate accommodations.
- Encourage peer support and friendships.
- Encourage practices that support wellness and a balanced life.

Source: Adapted from Canadian Mental Health Association (n.d.).

- ◆ **Responding to negative feedback** – low self-esteem, leading to difficulty in understanding and interpreting criticism and/or poor grades, and difficulty knowing what to do to improve or how to initiate changes
- ◆ **Responding to change** – difficulty coping with unexpected changes in coursework, such as changes in assignments, due dates, or instructors

*(Adapted from Mancuso, 1990, as cited by Canadian Mental Health Association, n.d., section headed “Recognizing When There’s a Problem”)*

Although mental illness can occur at any age, it often strikes children and youth from late adolescence to early adulthood. Serious mental illness can significantly interfere with learning, thinking, communicating, and sleeping. Medication, counselling, and psychosocial rehabilitation are treatment options that can help students recover from mental illness.

A variety of more common mental health problems, including temporary adjustment difficulties, moderate performance anxiety, and occasional mood swings, affect most people from time to time. Students experiencing these types of problems may not require medical treatment, but they may benefit from extra support and understanding on the part of teachers and parents. However, if these problems become prolonged or serious enough to affect the student’s learning, they could be a sign of serious mental illness and should be brought to the attention of parents and/or health professionals.

### ***Additional Factors Affecting Behaviour***

■ Student behaviour is affected not only by specific challenges like those just discussed but also by a broad range of influences that flow from the circumstances of the student’s life. For example, a student’s behaviour will be shaped by the presence or absence of the following:

- ◆ support from parents, other family, and other adults, at home, at school, and in the community;
- ◆ opportunities to be creative and to participate and interact in a variety of social situations;
- ◆ reasonable boundaries and realistic but high expectations for behaviour and achievement;
- ◆ opportunities to develop feelings of engagement in and commitment to learning;
- ◆ opportunities to develop positive values and attitudes such as empathy, a sense of fairness, a sense of responsibility, and a positive sense of self;
- ◆ opportunities to develop social skills that facilitate social adjustment and healthy relationships.

The Search Institute has developed an inventory of forty such factors, entitled “40 Developmental Assets” ([www.search-institute.org/assets](http://www.search-institute.org/assets)), which can help schools identify the gaps in a student’s “support system” and can provide a starting point for addressing negative behaviour in a constructive manner.

**FIGURE 8. HOW DEFICITS IN THE THREE AREAS AFFECT STUDENT  
LEARNING AND BEHAVIOUR**

Communication Disorders	Executive Function Deficits	Mental Health Problems
<p>Early difficulties with oral language set the stage for future academic challenges in the areas of reading comprehension, written language, listening, and relationships with peers and adults. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When students do not fully understand what is said to them, others can become frustrated with them, interaction and communication breaks down, and the stage is set for behaviour problems.</li> <li>• When students cannot quickly and easily present their ideas, point of view, or interpretation, communication breaks down and the stage is set for frustration and behaviour problems.</li> <li>• When comprehension and expressive problems interfere with learning, frustration increases, self-esteem suffers, and behaviour problems can also occur.</li> </ul> <p>Students with language impairment often have difficulty with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing the social language skills (e.g., turn-taking, conversational roles) needed to initiate and maintain social relationships;</li> <li>• understanding non-verbal communication and reading social cues;</li> <li>• using oral or written language for problem solving and self-advocacy in social situations;</li> <li>• using oral communication in stressful situations rather than physical responses and acting-out behaviours.</li> </ul> <p>Communication difficulties may contribute to frustration and low self-esteem and affect school success in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, and learning.</p> <p align="right"><i>(Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, n.d.)</i></p>	<p>Students with executive function deficits have difficulty regulating their behaviour in two ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using certain thinking skills (e.g., related to planning and time management) and working memory to picture a goal, plot a path to that goal, determine what resources are needed along the way, and keep the goal in mind over time even when other events intervene to occupy their attention and take space in their memory;</li> <li>• using other executive skills (e.g., related to response inhibition, self-regulation of affect, and flexibility) to guide or modify their behaviour as they move along a path, think before they act, regulate their emotions in order to reach an objective, and, when necessary, revise their plans in the face of obstacles.</li> </ul> <p align="right"><i>(Guare &amp; Dawson, 2004)</i></p>	<p>Symptoms of mental health problems may vary considerably from individual to individual. Common features of mental health problems, and particularly of mental illness, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty with information processing;</li> <li>• over-sensitivity to noise and other sensory stimuli;</li> <li>• over-sensitivity or confusion in interpersonal relations.</li> </ul> <p>In addition to symptoms of their illness, students may also be dealing with side-effects of medication they are taking to treat their illness. Side-effects can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• irritability;</li> <li>• physical effects such as shaking and dry mouth;</li> <li>• confusion and disorganized thinking;</li> <li>• sleepiness;</li> <li>• inability to concentrate.</li> </ul> <p>These features can interact to produce significant learning problems.</p> <p align="right"><i>(Canadian Mental Health Association, n.d.)</i></p>



**FIGURE 8 (CONT.) WHY DOES SCHOOL PRESENT A PARTICULAR CHALLENGE TO STUDENTS WHO HAVE DEFICITS IN THESE AREAS?**

Communication Disorders	Executive Function Deficits	Mental Health Problems
<p>A communication disorder is any disorder and/or delay within the scope of practice for a speech-language pathologist and/or audiologist, and includes problems such as speech-language disorders, hearing impairment, and reading and writing disorders. These difficulties lead to challenges at many levels in the classroom and in school, where students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are expected to learn through listening during much of the time spent in elementary school and most of the time spent in secondary school;</li> <li>• need the foundation of oral language skills in order to learn to read and write;</li> <li>• are required to follow instructions and directions delivered orally or in writing;</li> <li>• are exposed to increasingly complex language from Kindergarten through Grade 12, and are expected to learn vocabulary related to various subject areas;</li> <li>• are generally expected to demonstrate their learning through speaking and writing;</li> <li>• need well-developed receptive and expressive language skills to participate effectively in various learning activities (e.g., discussion, story retelling, problem solving, understanding word problems in mathematics);</li> <li>• need strong oral language, reading, and writing skills in order to generate, articulate, and focus ideas and to gather, interpret, and organize ideas and information for particular purposes in all subject areas;</li> <li>• rely on communication skills in their social interactions and in developing relationships with peers and adults. These skills include the ability to interpret facial expressions and body language and to understand and respect personal space.</li> </ul> <p>Being understood, achieving academic success, and developing a sense of belonging all depend heavily on effective communication skills – and all contribute to healthy emotional development and self-esteem.</p>	<p>Students’ ability to regulate their own behaviour is an important component of academic success. Students with executive function deficits may have difficulty carrying out academic tasks that require them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stay on task;</li> <li>• solve novel problems;</li> <li>• integrate new knowledge with prior knowledge; and</li> <li>• set goals and monitor progress</li> </ul> <p align="right"><i>(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005).</i></p> <p>They also often have difficulty making smooth transitions between activities, classes, school settings, and home or community settings.</p> <p>The developmental phase associated with puberty will often intensify the challenges faced by adolescents with executive function deficits. Adolescents face higher expectations from parents and teachers, coupled with a decrease in teacher monitoring and support. They are required to absorb increasing quantities of more complex information in shorter amounts of time. Transitions, first to high school, and then from high school to work or college/university also place increased demands on executive skills. Without appropriate understanding and support, students’ academic performance may deteriorate and their susceptibility to behavioural conflicts may increase.</p> <p align="right"><i>(Guare &amp; Dawson, 2004)</i></p>	<p>Students with mental illness and other mental health problems may have difficulty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• screening out environmental stimuli;</li> <li>• sustaining concentration;</li> <li>• maintaining stamina;</li> <li>• handling time pressure and multiple tasks;</li> <li>• interacting with others;</li> <li>• responding to negative feedback;</li> <li>• adapting to change.</li> </ul> <p>Mental illness can affect many aspects of a student’s life, including family and peer relationships and school performance. It can often strike at a critical point in a student’s development.</p> <p>Because mental health problems and symptoms of mental illness are not always apparent, educators need to be alert to significant changes in a student’s work habits, behaviour, performance, and attendance. A pattern that continues for a long period, or recurs repeatedly, may indicate an underlying serious mental health problem or mental illness.</p> <p align="right"><i>(Canadian Mental Health Association, n.d.)</i></p>

## *Assessing Capacity in the School, Home, and Community*

### **STAFF**

System and school leaders need to develop a clear picture of the professional knowledge and abilities school staff bring to the task of supporting all students, particularly students with special education needs. An assessment of staff capacity will need to consider their:

- ◆ knowledge about and experience with supporting students with special education needs;
- ◆ knowledge of and experience with a range of specific strategies for building and maintaining a caring and safe school culture;
- ◆ knowledge and experience of working collaboratively with other members of the school team to support students with special education needs.

### **PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

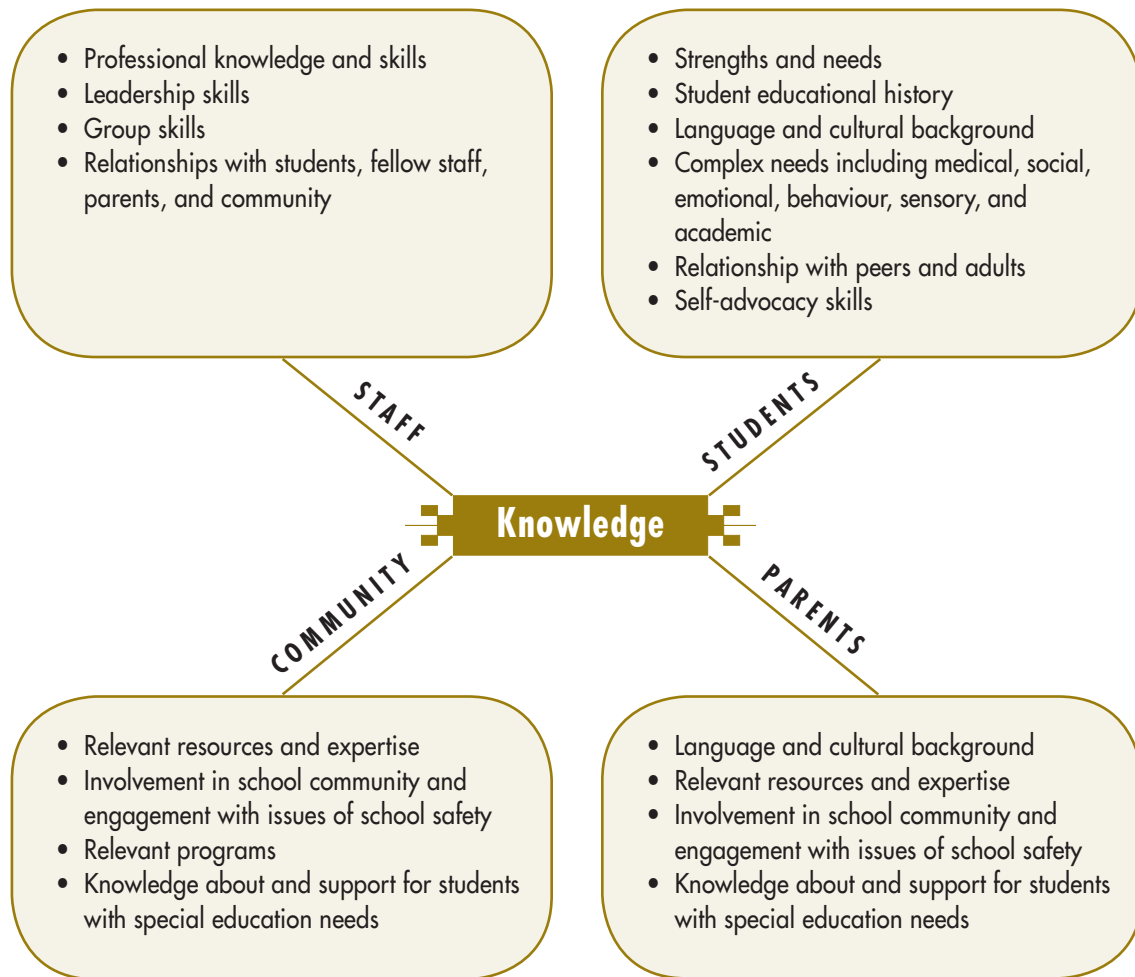
System and school leaders also need to identify knowledge and capabilities among parents and community members that they can draw upon in developing a caring and safe school culture and supporting all students. An assessment of parents' and community members' capacity will need to identify:

- ◆ community structures and resources that can complement a safe school strategy;
- ◆ resources and expertise that parents and community members might contribute to assist in supporting students with special education needs;
- ◆ existing cooperative relationships with parents and community members and possible ways of expanding them;
- ◆ existing means for communicating with parents and community members and communication gaps that may need to be bridged.

## *Areas of Knowledge: A Summary*

■ The knowledge web in Figure 9 summarizes the key information about students and about staff and community capacity that school and system leaders need to acquire, using a variety of assessment tools, before they can respond appropriately and effectively to behavioural issues.

**FIGURE 9. AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE NEEDED TO RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES AND TO CREATE A CARING AND SAFE SCHOOL CULTURE**



# 4

## *Investigating Strategies, Tools, and Resources*

This chapter outlines a variety of strategies, tools, and resources that system and school leaders may find helpful as they work to promote positive behaviour, address inappropriate behaviour, and build and sustain a caring and safe learning environment.

### **STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR**

#### *Direct Teaching of Social Skills*

■ Helping students learn how to get along with others is a key strategy in building a caring and safe school culture. While many students come to school with some social skills already in place, most students benefit from direct teaching of appropriate social skills, such as thinking before acting, listening, establishing and maintaining relationships, dealing with feelings, accepting consequences, and dealing with peer pressure.

Consistent modelling, teaching, and reinforcement of positive social skills is an important part of successfully encouraging positive social behaviour among students, helping to enhance students' self-control, respect for the rights of others, and sense of responsibility for their own actions.

## *Character Development Programs*

There are universal attributes that schools and communities value. Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture these attributes and use them as a standard against which we hold ourselves accountable. They are key aspects of school life. They bind us together and form the basis of responsible citizenship. They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education and for school communities that are respectful, safe, caring, and inclusive.

*(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 3)*

■ The ministry's character development initiative is part of its multifaceted strategy for building and maintaining caring, safe, healthy, and orderly school environments that are favourable to learning. School boards and schools are expected to work collaboratively with stakeholders representing the diversity in the community to identify attributes that reflect the shared values of the community and to promote their school-wide and community-wide development. At the level of the individual school, school staff can implement character development by modelling and teaching the identified attributes in all school, classroom, and co-curricular activities, and by incorporating them into their expectations for student behaviour.

A variety of character development initiatives that foster attributes such as respect for and inclusion of diversity, commitment, caring, courage, persistence, self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and loyalty are already being implemented in many schools. Examples of such initiatives are described in the document *Character Development in Action, K–12: Successful Practices in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008b).

### **STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**

#### *A Problem-Solving Approach*

■ A problem-solving approach to dealing with inappropriate behaviour is aimed at preventing the behaviour from occurring again by helping the student learn a positive behaviour, by empowering the student to take responsibility for solving the problem he or she caused, and by leaving the student with his or her dignity intact and a positive sense of accomplishment. It is the sense of accomplishment that motivates the student to repeat the appropriate behaviour (Mather, 2001). More detailed information about the steps in problem solving may be found in

the document *Shared Solutions: A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students With Special Education Needs* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007e, pp. 34–36).

Using a problem-solving approach to deal with inappropriate student behaviour is an important part of the recipe for successfully encouraging positive social behaviour among students.

### ***Restorative Practices***

■ The use of restorative practices has its roots in the Aboriginal concept and practice of “restorative justice”, a method of dealing with criminal justice issues that focuses on repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than on punishing offenders. Barton and van den Broek (1999) refer to restorative justice as part of “the ethic of care”. The guiding principle of restorative justice and restorative practices is the belief that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009).

In restorative practice the focus is on the harmful effects of offending, and the objective is to restore relationships. Offenders are required to meet those affected, to take responsibility for their actions, and to make amends, but they participate in the decision-making process rather than having a decision imposed on them (Drewery, 2004).

For example, restorative conferences or circles are designed to bring many different perspectives together in a conversation about the offence. The conference or circle is not simply an opportunity for community or school authorities to speak and adjudicate. Rather it is intended to give all parties a full opportunity to describe what has happened, how they feel about it, how it has affected them, and what they see as a solution.

The restorative conference or circle offers a pathway to restoring the relationships that have been breached by the offence. Victims can benefit from the opportunity to confront the perpetrators, and in doing so both restore themselves to greater strength and offer the offender an opportunity to provide redress (Drewery, 2004). Additional information on the use of the restorative circle is outlined in Figure 10.

**FIGURE 10. THE USE OF THE RESTORATIVE CIRCLE**

Objectives of a restorative circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide an insight for the offending student into the impact of his/her behaviour on others</li> <li>• To allow those affected to confront the offending student</li> <li>• To provide a safe, supportive environment in which those affected can state their views about how the harm should be repaired, as well as an opportunity for the offender to repair the harm that has resulted</li> <li>• To involve family and significant others and increase accountability and responsibility</li> <li>• To provide the school community with an appropriate response to disruptive and serious incidents</li> </ul>
Factors that contribute to successful restorative practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school management needs to be committed to the use of restorative practices rather than punitive practices.</li> <li>• All of the participants need to be allowed to tell their story from their own point of view.</li> <li>• The wrongdoer, in order to change and understand the impact of his/her actions, needs to experience the emotional impact those actions have had on the victim(s).</li> <li>• All parties need to feel that they had a significant voice in the decision (this will encourage better participation and a greater willingness to make the plan work).</li> </ul>
Outcomes of a restorative circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The victim is able to feel safe again.</li> <li>• The focus on harm and unacceptable behaviour can increase the likelihood that the wrongdoer will accept responsibility for what has happened.</li> <li>• The experience can enhance the wrongdoer's capacity for empathy and reduce the likelihood that he/she will re-offend.</li> <li>• The approach facilitates the offender's reintegration into the wider school community.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from J. McGrath, "School Restorative Conferencing", *Child Care in Practice*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2002), p. 196.

A major feature of the approach [i.e., restorative practice] is that it brings together a community of care around both the offender and those affected, and both "sides" share in the resolution of the problem (Drewery, 2004).

**ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING TOOLS**

***Early Development Instrument (EDI)***

■ The early development instrument is a means for measuring children's readiness to learn in a school environment in relation to developmental benchmarks rather than curriculum-based criteria. It measures children's early development in five general domains: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills and general knowledge. The early development instrument can be applied at either

Junior or Senior Kindergarten level (i.e., for either four- or five-year olds). A teacher uses her/his observations after several months of classroom/school interaction with the child to complete the questionnaire. The instrument provides information for groups of children in order to report on areas of strength and deficit for populations of children, monitor populations of children over time, and predict how children will do in elementary school (Offord Centre for Child Studies, 2008).

### ***Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA)***

■ A functional behavioural assessment involves gathering information that can be used to plan interventions to address inappropriate behaviour. The focus of the assessment is on identifying patterns of behaviour rather than on individual occurrences of problematic behaviour. This type of assessment is used to determine the relationship between a person's environment and the occurrence of the problematic behaviour (Centre for Autism and Related Exceptionalities, n.d., para. 1).

### ***Risk Assessment***

■ In an educational setting, a risk assessment can be used to identify sources of potential harm to students and adults, such as inappropriate behaviour by a student that shows signs of escalating. After identification is made, the probability and severity of the risk are evaluated, and measures are planned and put in place to manage the risk and prevent the harm from happening (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2006, para.2).

Indicators that a student's behaviour poses a potential risk of violence may include a history of violence or mental illness and a variety of environmental factors, along with corroborative data from those who know the student. The sample questions that follow may be useful for assessing a student's potential for violence, and could be included in a school-developed risk-assessment tool:

- ◆ Has the student made statements or taken actions that cause him/her to be a concern to the school? What motivated the student to behave in these ways?
- ◆ Has the student communicated to anyone concerning his/her state of mind or intentions?
- ◆ Has the student shown an interest in targeted violence, perpetrators of violence, weapons, extremist groups, or murder?
- ◆ Has the student engaged in attack-related behaviour such as harassing or stalking?
- ◆ Does the student have a history of mental illness with indications that he/she has acted on delusions or hallucinations?
- ◆ Has the student exhibited extreme behaviours that are linked to conduct disorders or other mental health issues? Have these behaviours resulted in injuries or trauma to self and/or others?



- ◆ How organized is the student? Is he/she capable of developing and carrying out a plan?
- ◆ Has the student experienced a recent loss or loss of status leading to feelings of desperation and despair?
- ◆ Do the student's statements contradict his/her actions?
- ◆ Is there concern among those who know the student that he/she might take action based on inappropriate ideas?
- ◆ What factors in the student's life and/or environment might increase/decrease the likelihood that he/she would attempt violence?
- ◆ Does the student have a behaviour management plan and/or IEP addressing antecedents, behaviours, intervention strategies, and consequences? Is the IEP plan working?

*(Adapted from Burns, Dean, & Jacob-Timm, et al., 2001, p. 243)*

Intervention strategies to deal proactively with an identified risk and/or with special education needs should be planned by a team of individuals with relevant expertise who are partners in the student's education. This team should include parents, the student, school personnel, and community and system resources, as appropriate. The resulting plans should be flexible and should include prevention and intervention strategies that reflect the student's strengths and needs and the educational context. This plan may also need to identify necessary procedures for requesting and obtaining assistance from mental health professionals and, when required, police services.

### ***Behaviour Support Plan (BSP)***

■ A behaviour support plan is a written plan that is designed to target the underlying reason for behaviour, replace the inappropriate behaviour with an appropriate behaviour that serves the same function, and reduce or eliminate the challenging behaviour (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a). In school boards, behaviour support plans are sometimes referred to as behaviour management plans.

### ***Safety Plan***

■ A safety plan is a plan developed for a student whose behaviour is known to pose an ongoing risk to him or herself, other students, staff, or other people in general. It can serve as a crisis-response plan that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the staff in dealing with specific problem behaviours. The development of a safety plan involves all staff who work on an ongoing and daily basis with a student, as well as parents and the representatives from any community agencies working with the student/family.

### *Cooperative Learning*

■ Cooperative learning is an instructional method that emphasizes small-group work. The teacher puts students with different abilities and talents into a small group and assigns that group a specific task, with the requirement that the students work together to carry out the task. Cooperative learning fosters both positive interdependence and responsibility. Students learn appropriate social behaviour and skills when they are put into a learning situation that requires them to work constructively with a group (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005).

### *Differentiated Instruction (DI)*

■ Differentiated instruction is a method of teaching based on the idea that because students differ significantly in their interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn, it is necessary to adapt instruction to suit these differing characteristics in an environment that is planned and organized to meet the needs of all students. The teacher can differentiate one or a number of the following elements in any classroom learning situation: (1) the content of learning (what the students are going to learn); (2) the process of learning (the types of tasks and activities); (3) the products of learning (the ways in which students demonstrate learning); and (4) the affect/environment (the context and environment in which students learn and demonstrate learning) (Tomlinson, 2008, as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009e).

### *The Tiered Approach*

■ The “tiered” approach is a systematic, sequential approach to providing high-quality, evidence-based instruction and appropriate interventions that respond to students’ individual needs. It is based on frequent monitoring of student progress and the use of assessment data, focusing on learning rate and level, to identify students who are having difficulty and to plan specific instructional interventions of increasing intensity to address their needs effectively. It can be used to address both academic and behavioural needs (Vaughn et al., 2003).

### *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)*

■ Universal design for learning is a teaching approach based on research showing that assistance targeted at a specific group can help all students (Turnbull et al., 2002, as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Its aim is to assist teachers in applying teaching strategies or pedagogical materials designed to meet the special needs of specific students or groups of students to enhance learning for *all* students, regardless of age, skills, or situations.

## STRATEGIES AND TOOLS FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: AN OVERVIEW

The strategies and tools described in the preceding sections are examples of a wide range of strategies that are used for a variety of purposes to enhance learning and support students. The table in Figure 11 provides an overview of a broader sampling of strategies and tools that are available to serve specific purposes in key areas of school activity. Most are already familiar to and regularly used by schools and boards. A number of strategies/tools that serve multiple purposes are listed in more than one category. The list is not meant to be exhaustive.

<b>FIGURE 11. STRATEGIES AND TOOLS FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES</b>	
<b>Area of Activity</b>	<b>Related Strategies and Tools</b>
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying prevention and intervention programs</li> <li>• Character development programs</li> <li>• Programs and activities that focus on building healthy relationships and peer relationships</li> <li>• Equity and diversity initiatives (e.g., restorative practice/circle, character development program)</li> <li>• Programs to build and sustain a caring and safe learning environment for all students</li> </ul>
Early and ongoing intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social skills programs</li> <li>• Peer-support, mentorship, and leadership programs</li> <li>• Positive behaviour practices (e.g., conflict mediation strategy, problem-solving approach, restorative practice/circle)</li> <li>• Character development programs</li> </ul>
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom observation</li> <li>• Anecdotal notes</li> <li>• Provincial Report Cards</li> <li>• Ontario Student Record (OSR)</li> <li>• Early development instrument (EDI)</li> <li>• Educational assessments (e.g., EQAO/OSSLT, board/school/teacher assessment tools)</li> <li>• Professional assessments (e.g., by psychologist, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist/physiotherapist, audiologist, medical professional, social worker)</li> <li>• Behaviour log (e.g., ABC chart [see <i>Glossary</i>])</li> <li>• Functional behaviour assessment (FBA)</li> <li>• Risk assessment</li> <li>• Caring and safe school environmental assessments (e.g., cultural audit, action research, school effectiveness survey, Student Success/Learning to 18 indicator data)</li> </ul>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual education plan (IEP)</li> <li>• Behaviour support plan</li> <li>• Safety plan</li> <li>• Transition plan</li> <li>• Communication plan</li> </ul>

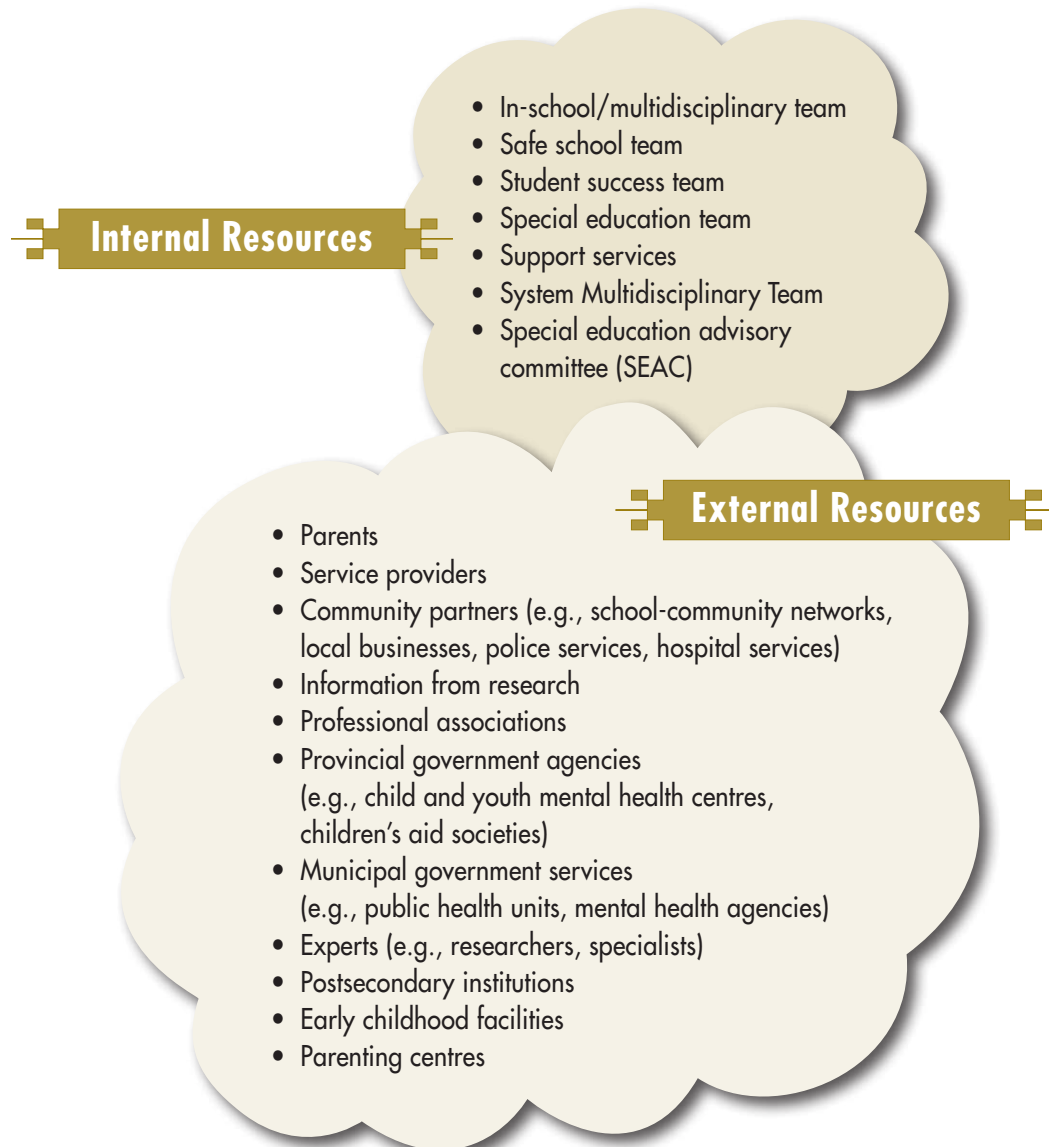
**FIGURE 11 (CONT.) STRATEGIES AND TOOLS FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES**

Area of Activity	Related Strategies and Tools
Programming and instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal design for learning (UDL)</li> <li>• Differentiated instruction (DI)</li> <li>• Cooperative learning</li> <li>• The tiered approach</li> <li>• Accommodations and modifications</li> <li>• Alternative programs (e.g., learning strategies course, cooperative education program, short-term intervention programs, dual credits, Specialist High Skills Major program)</li> </ul>
Communication and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication log</li> <li>• Recording and tracking tool</li> <li>• Outreach initiatives to strengthen partnerships with parents and community agencies and resources (e.g., creation of a hub [see <i>Glossary</i>])</li> <li>• In-school support team/multidisciplinary team</li> <li>• Collaborative problem solving</li> </ul>
Capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System/school-wide staff training on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ policies and protocols</li> <li>◦ prevention and intervention programs and strategies</li> </ul> </li> <li>• New teacher and new administrator induction and mentorship programs</li> <li>• Professional learning communities (PLCs)</li> <li>• Ongoing professional development related to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ understanding the needs of diverse learners</li> <li>◦ targeted strategies to support students with special education needs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Alignment of resources and initiatives</li> <li>• Leadership development at school and system levels</li> </ul>

## INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RESOURCES

A variety of internal and external supports are available to system and school leaders as they implement plans for building caring and safe schools and addressing behavioural issues. A number of these are identified in Figure 12.

**FIGURE 12. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SUPPORTS**



## PRINT AND INTERNET RESOURCES

Resources that provide research information about specific behaviour-related areas are listed below. The list is not intended to be exhaustive.

### ■ Bullying and Bullying Prevention

Canadian Public Health Association. (2004). *Assessment toolkit for bullying, harassment, and peer relations at school*. Ottawa: Author. Available at [http://acsp.cpha.ca/antibullying/english/backinfo/Assessment\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://acsp.cpha.ca/antibullying/english/backinfo/Assessment_Toolkit.pdf).

Craig, W. (1998). The relationship among bullying, victimization, depression, anxiety and aggression in elementary school children. *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 24, pp. 123–30.

Craig, W.M., & Harel, Y. (2004). Bullying, physical fighting and victimization. In C. Currie, C. Roberts, A. Morgan, et al. (Eds.). *Young people's health in context: International report from the HBSC 2001/02 survey*, pp. 133–44. WHO Policy Series. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Media Awareness Network. (2009). *Cyber bullying: Encouraging ethical online behaviour*. Classroom resource: a series of bilingual lessons intended to support and enhance school-based anti-bullying and empathy-building programs. Available at [www.media-awareness.ca/](http://www.media-awareness.ca/).

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009). *Bullying: We can all help stop it. A guide for parents of elementary and secondary school students*. Toronto: Author. Available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/bullying.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/bullying.pdf).

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009). Sample School Climate Surveys, Registry of Resources for Safe and Inclusive Schools. Safe Schools. Toronto: Author. Available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/climate.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/climate.html).

PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network). A Networks of Centres of Excellence new initiative. Available at <http://prevnet.ca/>.

### ■ Communication and Communication Disorders

*Behavioral Disorders: Journal of the Council for Children With Behavioral Disorders*. (2003). Special issue: The relationship of language and behaviour. Vol. 29, no. 1 (December).

Beitchman, Joseph H.; Wilson, Beth; Johnson, Carla J.; et al. (2001). Fourteen-year follow-up of speech/language-impaired and control children: Psychiatric outcome. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 75–82.

Bierman, Karen L. (2003). *Programs and services proven to be effective in reducing aggression in young children*. Comments on Webster-Stratton, Domitrovich and Greenberg, and Lochman. (May 20). Available at [www.child-encyclopedia.com/Pages/PDF/BiermanANGxp.pdf](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/Pages/PDF/BiermanANGxp.pdf); or <http://www.enfant-encyclopedie.com/Pages/PDF/BiermanANGxp.pdf>.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation. A website that provides resources to support families caring for children and adults with severe learning disabilities and challenging behaviour. Available at [www.thecbf.org.uk/resources/comms-dvd.htm](http://www.thecbf.org.uk/resources/comms-dvd.htm).

Hancock, T.B.; Kaiser, A.P.; & Delaney, E.M. (2002). Teaching parents of preschoolers at high risk: Strategies to support language and positive behaviour. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, vol. 22, no. 4 (December), pp. 191–212.

Prizant, B.; Audet, L.; Burke, G.; et al. (1990). Common disorders and emotional/behavioural disorders in children and adolescents. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders*, vol. 55, pp. 179–92.

Talking Point. A website dedicated to children's communication. Available at [www.ican.org.uk/TalkingPoint/Home.aspx](http://www.ican.org.uk/TalkingPoint/Home.aspx).

Warr-Leeper, G.A., & Mack, A.E. (1992). Language abilities in boys with chronic behaviour disorders. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in the Schools*, vol. 23, pp. 214–23.

Warr-Leeper, G.; Wright, N.; & Mack, A. (1994). Language disabilities of antisocial boys in residential treatment. *Journal of Behavioral Disorders*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 159–70.

Woods, B. (1976). *Children and communication: Verbal and non-verbal language development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

## ■ Executive Function Deficits

Dawson, P., & Guare, R. (2004). *Executive skills in children and adolescents: A practical guide to assessment and intervention*. New York: Guilford Press.

Lyon, G.R., & Krasnegor, N.A. (Eds.). (1996). *Attention, memory, and executive function*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes. (Chapter 15).

## ■ **Mental Health Problems/Mental Illness**

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2004). *Handle with care. Strategies for promoting the mental health of young children in community-based child care.* Ottawa: Author.

Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation. (2004). *When something's wrong: Ideas for families.* Toronto: Author.

Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation. (2005). *When something's wrong: Ideas for teachers.* Toronto: Author.

Senate of Canada. (2006). *Out of the shadows at last: Transforming mental health, mental illness and addiction services in Canada. The final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.* Ottawa: Author.  
Available at [www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/pdf/rep02may06part1-e.pdf](http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/pdf/rep02may06part1-e.pdf).

## ■ **Websites:**

Canadian Mental Health Association:  
[www.cmha.ca/bins/index.asp](http://www.cmha.ca/bins/index.asp).

Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation:  
[www.cprf.ca/](http://www.cprf.ca/).

Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario: The Provincial Centre for Excellence  
[www.cheo.on.ca/english/hub.shtml](http://www.cheo.on.ca/english/hub.shtml).

Children's Mental Health Ontario:  
[www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/).

Mental Health Canada:  
[www.mentalhealthcanada.com/](http://www.mentalhealthcanada.com/).

Mental Health Commission of Canada:  
[www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/Pages/index.html](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/Pages/index.html).



# 5

## *Addressing Behavioural Issues Through a Progressive Discipline Approach*

**T**he use of progressive discipline in addressing issues of student behaviour flows from and supports the principles and practices of caring and safe schools. Its goal is to enable students to discard inappropriate behaviour in favour of behaviour that represents a constructive response to the challenges they face. As stated in Chapter 1, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145 describes progressive discipline as the use of “a continuum of prevention programs, interventions, supports and consequences to address inappropriate student behaviour and to build upon strategies that foster positive behaviours. When inappropriate behaviour occurs, disciplinary measures should be applied within a framework that shifts the focus from one that is solely punitive to one that is both corrective and supportive. Schools should utilize a range of interventions, supports, and consequences that are developmentally appropriate and include learning opportunities for reinforcing positive behaviour while helping students to make good choices” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009g, p. 3).

As the policy makes clear, a progressive discipline approach has two aspects – promoting positive behaviour and addressing inappropriate behaviour – both of which are discussed in detail in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. In order to implement this approach, boards and schools need to develop policies on progressive discipline that meet the requirements in PPM 145 and that reflect local conditions and the availability of internal and external resources. (School policies must be consistent with board policies.) These policies should provide guidelines and identify procedures to help school leaders and staff:

- ◆ assess student behaviour and the effectiveness of existing supports and interventions;
- ◆ develop a response that takes account of mitigating circumstances and other factors that may have influenced the behaviour.

## Assessing Student Behaviour

■ The sample information-gathering tool provided in Figure 13 may be helpful to boards and schools in developing guidelines for assessing student behaviour. The tool is designed for assessing the behaviour of students with special education needs, although it may be adapted for use with all students. The sample form includes a checklist for identifying supports and interventions that are already in place for the student and assessing their effectiveness.

**FIGURE 13. SAMPLE INFORMATION-GATHERING TOOL FOR ASSESSING THE BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS\***

Student Information	
<b>Name:</b> _____	
<b>Grade:</b> _____	<b>Age:</b> _____
<b>Gender:</b> M <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/>	
Brief description of recent behavioural issues and/or types of incidents:	
Description of what has typically led up to recent incidents (e.g., transition issue/distractions, peer interaction, events):	
Description of types of immediate responses to and consequences of incidents:	
Special education information: <input type="checkbox"/> IEP <input type="checkbox"/> IPRC	Exceptionality (if applicable): _____
Program _____	Service(s) _____
Relevant Information: (e.g., most recent report card; summary of assessments; communication, social, and self-help skills; relevant family information; first language; medical information; previous school(s)/board information; previous incidents)	

\*This sample information-gathering tool is intended for collecting information over time and to facilitate information sharing during student transitions.

**Figure 13 (cont.)**

<b>Prevention and/or Intervention Strategies</b>			
<b>Behaviour Support Strategies</b>	<b>Effective</b> ✓	<b>Not Effective</b> ✓	<b>Comments</b>
Prevention and early intervention programs			
Social skills program			
Peer support/mentoring/ leadership programs			
Positive behaviour development programs (e.g., character development)			
Corrective/supportive strategies (e.g., restorative practices/ circles)			
Behaviour log			
Functional behaviour assessment			
Behaviour support plan			
Safety plan			
Classroom environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical set-up</li> <li>• Classroom routines that encourage positive behaviours and interactions</li> </ul>			
Classroom accommodations and/or curriculum modifications			
Transition plan			
Communication plan			
Partnership with parents			
Ongoing support through in-school support team and/or multidisciplinary team			
Involvement of safe schools team			
Involvement of community agencies/professionals			
Other strategies			

## *Considering Mitigating Circumstances and Other Factors*

■ Boards and schools are required to take into account a variety of mitigating circumstances and other factors when making decisions about whether a particular behaviour calls for suspension or expulsion. It is recommended that boards and schools also consider mitigating circumstances and other factors in responding to less severe cases. This recommendation is consistent with the premise of this document – that responding constructively to behaviour issues requires a comprehensive effort to understand the challenges students face.

The checklist in Figure 14 identifies the types of circumstances and factors that boards and schools should consider in making disciplinary decisions, with a particular focus on the circumstances of students with special education needs.

Some but not all students with special education needs will have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Boards and schools need to ensure that their progressive discipline policies and procedures provide for both groups – those students with special education needs who have an IEP and those who do not. Figure 15 identifies procedures that might be part of a progressive discipline approach for students with special education needs. The list is not intended to be comprehensive.

Where the nature and severity of student behaviour point to the need for suspension, consideration of mitigating circumstances and other factors is mandatory. If a decision in favour of suspension is ultimately made, mitigating circumstances and other factors must also be taken into account in determining the duration of the suspension. Figure 16 shows the stages in a suspension process.

Opportunities must be made available for a suspended or expelled student to continue his or her education. Boards should consult Policy/Program Memorandum No. 141, “School Board Programs for Students on Long-term Suspension”, and Policy/Program Memorandum No. 142, “School Board Programs for Expelled Students”, for guidance on providing educational opportunities for students who have been suspended or expelled (Ministry of Education, 2007d and 2007c).

**FIGURE 14. CONSIDERATIONS IN ADDRESSING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**

**Considerations for the most appropriate response to address inappropriate behaviour:**

- Particular student circumstances (e.g., mitigating or other factors)
- The nature and severity of the behaviour
- The impact on the school climate (i.e., the relationships within the school community)

**Mitigating circumstances applicable to the student:**

- The student does not have the ability to control his or her behaviour.
- The student does not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behaviour.
- The student's continuing presence in the school does not create an unacceptable risk to the safety of any person.

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other factors to consider:

- the student's history
- whether a progressive discipline approach has been used with the student
- whether the activity for which the student may be or is being suspended or expelled was a consequence of harassment of the student because of his or her race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation, or any other factor
- how the suspension or expulsion would affect the student's ongoing education
- the age of the student
- in the case of a student for whom an Individual Education Plan (IEP) has been developed,
  - i. whether the behaviour was a manifestation of a disability identified in the student's individual education plan
  - ii. whether appropriate individual accommodation has been provided
  - iii. whether the suspension or expulsion is likely to result in an aggravation or worsening of the student's behaviour or conduct

Information about the school culture – i.e., is the student accepted and respected, and are others aware of his or her special education needs?

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**FIGURE 15. PROCEDURES AND CONSIDERATIONS IN A PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE APPROACH FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS**



A student's IEP may require some or all of the following:

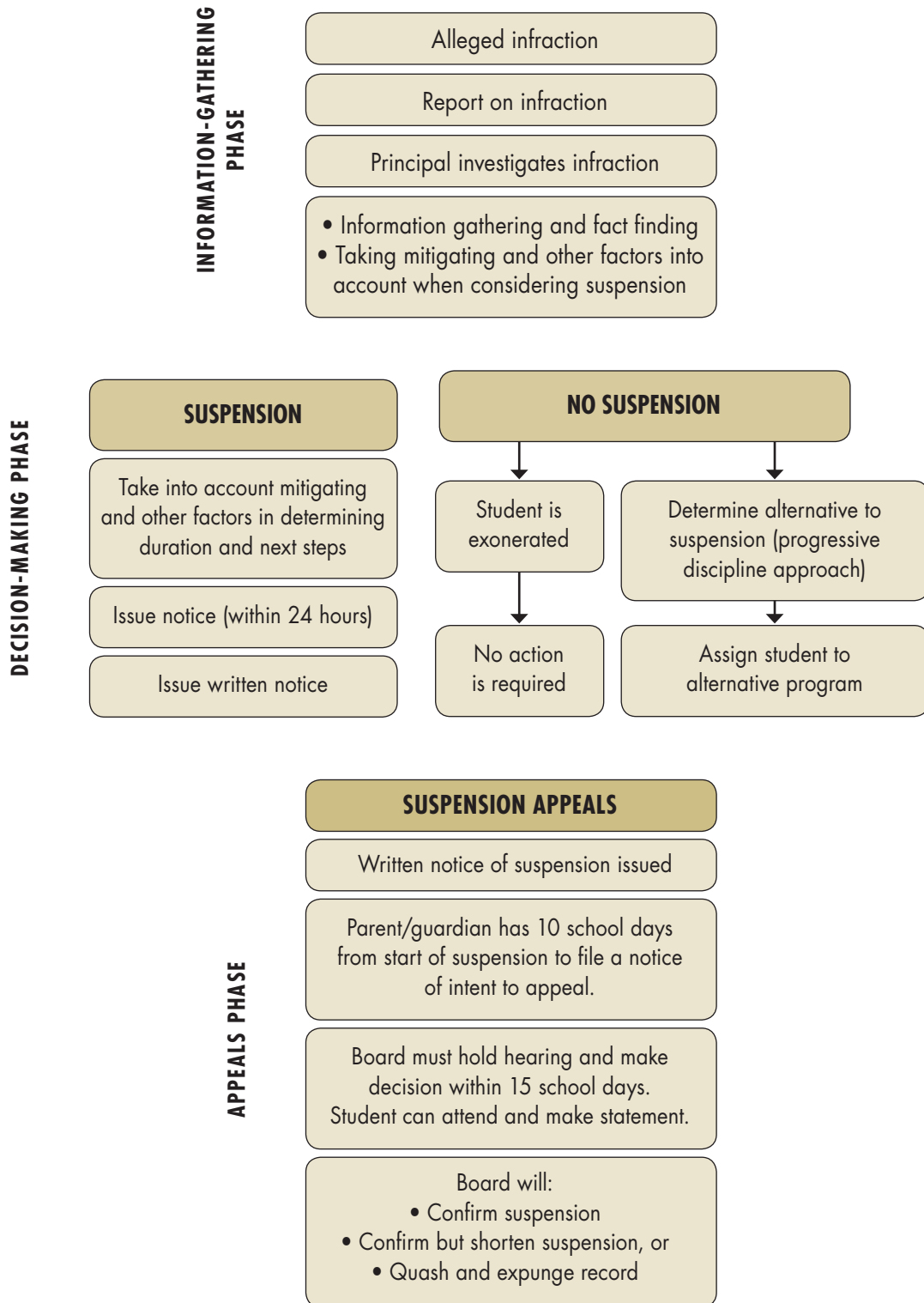
- various types of accommodations
- modified or alternative learning expectations
- behaviour intervention strategies
- human resources support
- transition plan

For students with special education needs, all interventions, supports, and consequences must be consistent with the student's IEP

Additional supports and/or interventions for students with an IEP may include some or all of the following:

- support from in-school team
- referrals for professional assessments and/or to an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)
- support from outside agencies and/or community organizations

**FIGURE 16. SUSPENSION PROCESS**



## *Taking Action*

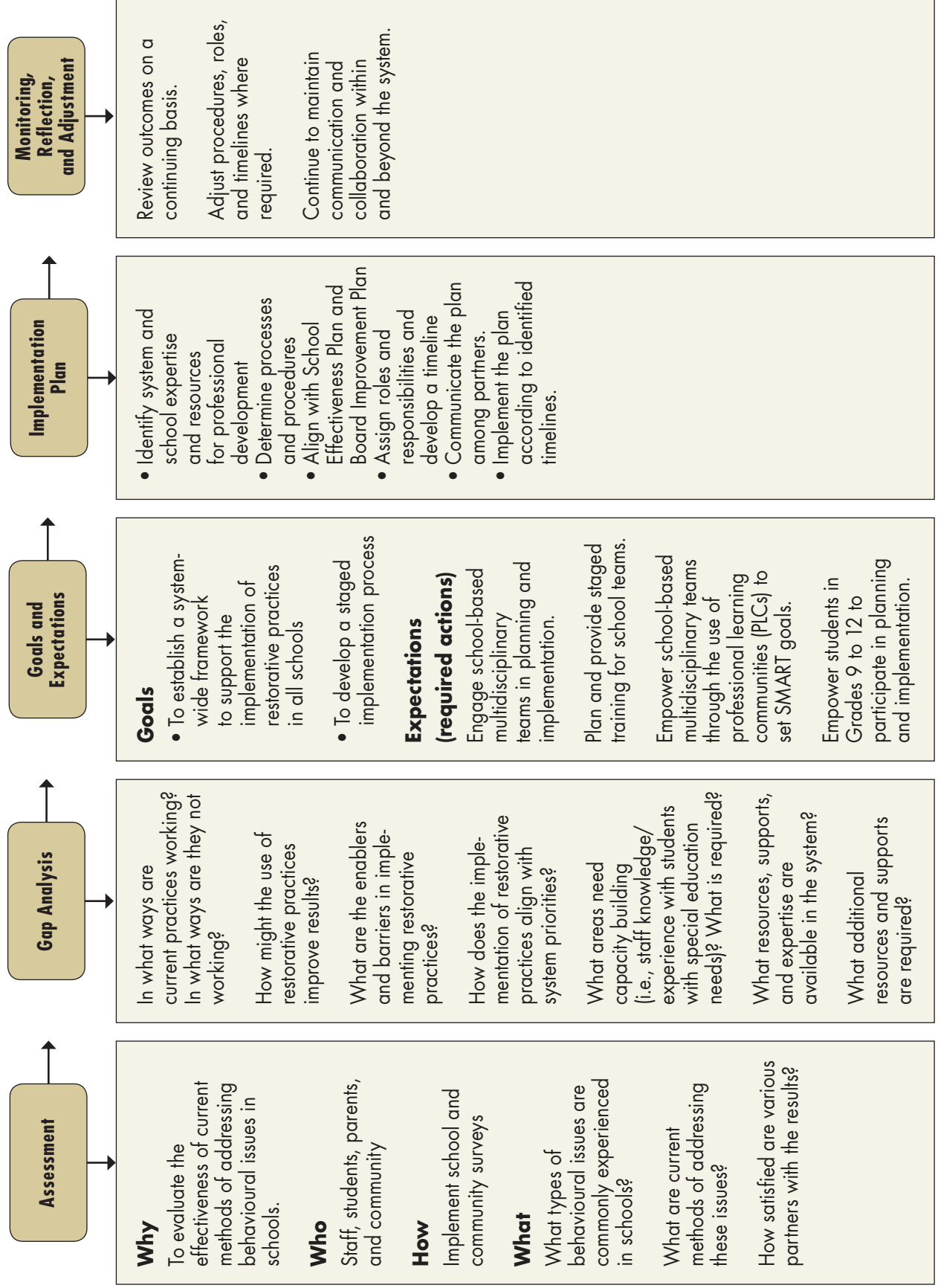
■ Boards and schools may already have in place a process for planning and implementing change to improve school culture and address issues of student behaviour. Or they may wish to follow a process similar to the one outlined in the “Sample Implementation Framework” provided in Chapter 2 (see Figure 3, p. 17). Whether at the system, school, or classroom level, such a process would include the following stages:

- ◆ assessing both school culture and individual students to identify areas for improvement or intervention
- ◆ interpreting assessment data (gap analysis) to clarify needs
- ◆ consulting with stakeholders and experts to set goals, expectations, and priorities
- ◆ identifying appropriate implementation strategies and resources, assigning responsibilities, and setting timelines
- ◆ tracking to assess progress and results, adjust goals and actions as required, and identify new or emerging needs

A variation on this process is illustrated in Figure 17, which shows how a generic planning template might be used to plan and implement specific interventions – in this case, the use of “restorative practices” – in individual schools or in schools across the system. (A blank copy of this template for use by boards and schools is provided in the Appendix, “Sample Planning Template”.)

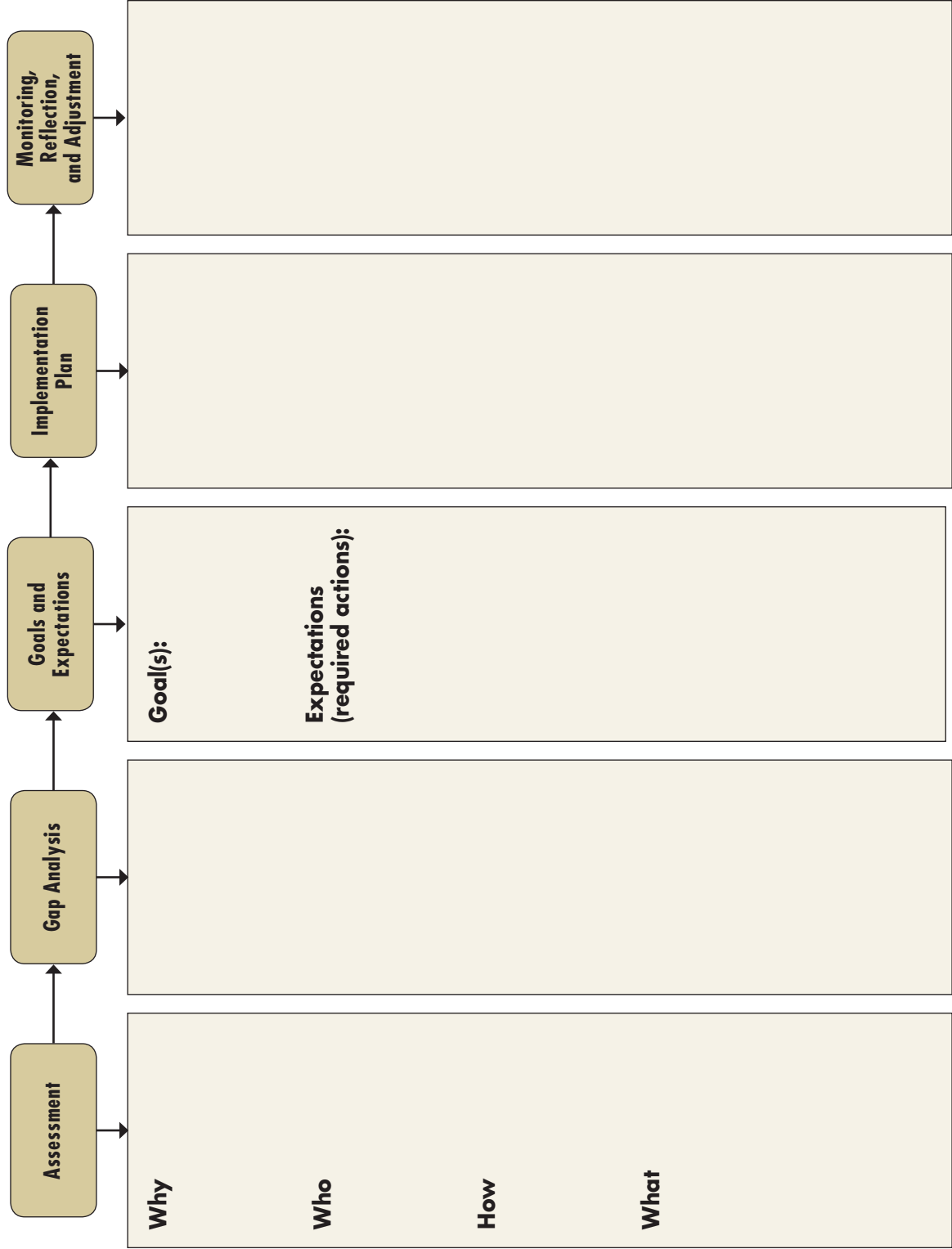


**FIGURE 17: IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES, KINDERGARTEN—GRADE 12  
(SAMPLE PLANNING TEMPLATE FOR SCHOOL SYSTEMS)**



**APPENDIX: SAMPLE PLANNING TEMPLATE**

Planning Template For \_\_\_\_\_



## GLOSSARY

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**ABC chart:** A tool for recording observations about student behaviour and events related to it. “A” refers to the antecedent of a problem behaviour (i.e., the event or activity that immediately precedes it). “B” refers to the observed behaviour. “C” refers to the consequence (event) that immediately follows the behaviour. Also known as a behaviour log.

**accommodations:** The special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 25).

**behaviour log:** *See ABC chart.*

**behaviour support plan:** A written plan that is designed to target the underlying reason for behaviour, replace the inappropriate behaviour with an appropriate behaviour that serves the same function, and reduce or eliminate the challenging behaviour (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a). In school boards, behaviour support plans are sometimes referred to as behaviour management plans.

**circle of friends:** A variation on the restorative circle. *See restorative circle.*

**communication disorder:** Any disorder and/or delay within the scope of practice for a speech-language pathologist and/or an audiologist. (*See Chapter 3.*)

**cooperative learning:** An instructional method in which students with different abilities and talents work cooperatively in teacher-assigned groups to complete a specific task. The strategy is designed to promote the development of appropriate social behaviour and skills. (*See Chapter 4.*)

**differentiated instruction (DI):** A method of teaching that attempts to adapt instruction to suit the differing interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn of individual students. (*See Chapter 4.*)

**early development instrument (EDI):** A questionnaire designed to measure children’s readiness to learn in terms of developmental benchmarks related to the child’s physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills and general knowledge. (*See Chapter 4.*)

**executive function:** A set of cognitive processes that help students perform such activities as planning, organizing, strategizing, and paying attention to and remembering details. (*See Chapter 3.*)

**functional behaviour assessment:** A type of assessment used to identify patterns of behaviour and the relationship between conditions/events in a person’s environment and occurrences of specific types of problematic behaviour. (*See Chapter 4.*)

**hub:** A community school that is open to the neighbourhood and capable of providing supports to enhance children’s care and health and opportunities for children’s learning, recreation, and cultural and arts experiences.

**Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC):** Regulation 181/98 requires that all school boards establish one or more Identification, Placement and Review Committees. The IPRC meets and decides if a student should be identified as an exceptional pupil and, if so, the placement that will best meet the student’s needs. An IPRC comprises at least

three persons, one of whom must be a principal or supervisory officer of the board. A school board trustee may not be on the IPRC (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, p. D4).

**Individual Education Plan (IEP):** A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs – that is, the strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and to demonstrate learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 6).

**in-school support team:** A school-based team that suggests teaching strategies to classroom teachers who have students with special education needs and that recommends formal and informal assessments. An in-school support team is made up of people with various types of expertise who work together. In most schools, the core members of the team would include the principal or vice-principal; the school special education resource teacher (if available); a guidance teacher-counsellor (especially at the secondary level), and possibly the student's current teacher and/or the "referring" teacher (adapted from Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, pp. C6–C7). When appropriate, the team may also include representatives from the school board and/or the community.

**language disorder:** A disorder that affects the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, and/or use of verbal or non-verbal communication.

**mental health:** A state of mind that enables people to enjoy life and deal with everyday challenges such as making choices and decisions, adapting, coping, and communicating about their needs and desires. (See Chapter 3.)

**mental health problems:** Mental, psychological, and emotional problems and dysfunctions ranging from diagnosable conditions requiring medical treatment (see *mental illness*) to the more common psychological and emotional struggles and difficulties that affect most people from time to time. Mental health problems can affect a person's ability to enjoy life and deal with everyday challenges, and can impede learning. (See Chapter 3.)

**mental illness:** A diagnosable mental condition that usually requires medical treatment, including mood, psychotic, and anxiety disorders. Mental illnesses involve a range of psychiatric and emotional problems that vary in intensity and duration and may recur from time to time. (See Chapter 3.)

**mitigating factors:** Factors, identified in Ontario Regulation 472/07, "Suspension and Expulsion of Pupils", that must be taken into account by a principal when considering whether to suspend or expel a student. The absence of risk to others in the school and/or the student's inability to control his or her behaviour or understand the consequences of the behaviour are examples of mitigating factors. (See Chapter 1.)

**modifications:** Changes made in the age-appropriate grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student's learning needs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 25).

**multidisciplinary team:** A formal or informal group or learning community made up of internal and/or external resource personnel with various types of expertise who work together to:

- support students and parents;
- collaborate, consult, and share information and knowledge to identify strategies that may increase students' learning success and close achievement gaps.

A multidisciplinary team can play a significant role in helping classroom teachers address difficulties that a student may be experiencing in the classroom prior to and after formal

assessment and identification. It can provide valuable insights and expertise into possible interventions and assistance in solving problems. The active involvement of parents and students enhances the effectiveness of the team (adapted from Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, pp. C6–C7).

**restorative practices:** Ways of responding to inappropriate behaviour that focus on repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than on punishing the offender. (See Chapter 4.)

**risk assessment:** An assessment used to identify sources of potential harm to students and adults, such as inappropriate behaviour by a student that shows signs of escalating. (See Chapter 4.)

**safety plan:** A crisis-response plan that outlines the roles and responsibilities of staff in dealing with risky or potentially risky behaviour by a student. Development of the plan involves all staff who work on an ongoing and daily basis with a student, as well as parents and representatives from any community agencies working with the student/family.

**the tiered approach:** A systematic, sequential instructional approach that uses specific instructional interventions of increasing intensity to address students' needs. It can be used to address either the academic or the behavioural needs of students who are having difficulty. (See Chapter 4.)

**universal design for learning (UDL):** A teaching approach that focuses on using teaching strategies or pedagogical materials designed to meet special needs to enhance learning for *all* students, regardless of age, skills, or situation. (See Chapter 4.)

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