


Elementary Mental Health Literacy Resource (EMHLR)

The Elementary Mental Health Literacy Resource (EMHLR) is the first of its kind classroom-ready* resource designed for classroom teachers and related stakeholders to teach students in Grades 4 to 6 about mental health.

The conceptual framework of the EMHLR is drawn on an evidence-based mental health curriculum resource for the secondary school setting, *Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide (the Guide)* (<http://mhlcurriculum.org/about-the-guide/download-the-guide/>). The Guide has been extensively implemented and researched in Canada and internationally. The development of the EMHLR is also informed by a Delphi study involving over 100 stakeholders (classroom teachers, school mental health professionals such as counsellors, psychologists, social workers, school administrators, special education experts, and curriculum design experts) from 13 provinces and territories in Canada as well as professionals from four other countries: Japan, the United Kingdom, Finland and the United States. The EMHLR is further informed by an environmental scan of related Canadian mental health websites and an extensive and systematic literature search of evidence-based mental health literacy programs. The EMHLR was developed in response to the many requests from school partners familiar with *the Guide*, who recognised the importance of introducing mental health literacy concepts to younger students.




***Lessons can be delivered face-to-face, online, or a mix of both.**

What is the purpose of the EMHLR?

The EMHLR aims to help students:

- develop skills to obtain and maintain good mental health
- improve understanding about mental health and mental / neurodevelopmental disorders
- reduce stigma against mental / neurodevelopmental disorders, and
- promote help-seeking intentions and behaviours when necessary



***Please note: 'teachers' refer to anyone who is delivering this resource.**

The EMHLR is flexibly designed for Grades 4 to 6 classroom teachers* to deliver the core concepts and classroom activities within diverse classroom settings. Teachers can adapt the activities using the pedagogies they are familiar with to best meet student needs.

What are the major concepts for each module?

Module 1: Understanding mental health

- Everyone has mental health
- Mental health has a wide range of states, including no distress, mental distress (aka stress), mental health problems and mental disorders
- Mental health is more than a positive mood (good mental health isn't just feeling happy)
- It is important to use appropriate words to describe our emotions, to regulate and cope

Module 2: The stigma of mental /neurodevelopmental disorders

- Stigma involves negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours towards mental disorders and their treatments
- People with a mental/neurodevelopmental disorder can live a fulfilling life
- Stigma acts as a barrier to people seeking help
- We can all help to reduce stigma around mental disorders (e.g. using appropriate words to describe thoughts and feelings and life events)

Module 3: Mental health and the brain

- The brain changes over time
- Our thoughts, feelings, behaviours and reactions to the environment are linked with the brain
- The brain and the body are connected
- Mental health is a component of overall health

Module 4: Common mental / neurodevelopmental disorders

- All mental disorders reflect difficulties in thoughts, emotions and feelings, daily activities, physical health, behaviours and signalling
- The sooner people receive proper treatment and support, the better the outcome
- It is important to distinguish between expected life challenges and having a mental/neurodevelopment disorder

Module 5: Helping self and helping others

- Everyone has mental health that can be supported and promoted
- There are many ways of seeking help for mental health problems and mental disorders
- Getting help early for yourself and others increases positive mental health outcomes

Module 6: Getting mentally healthy

- What is good for physical health is good for mental health
- Coping with stress appropriately will help to build resilience and new skills
- 'The Big 5' pillars of health (restorative sleep, strong social connection, vigorous physical activity, healthy eating and helping others) enhance mental health

What is the structure of the EMHLR?

The EMHLR provides teachers with classroom-ready lessons, activities and easily accessible resources grouped under six modules. The EMHLR modules are designed to be taught in sequence. Before delivering the resource, please review the [EMHLR Book 1: Core Concepts for Educators](#) and all of the modules to familiarise yourself with the content and delivery formats.

Review
**EMHLR Book 1:
Core Concepts for
Educators** before
delivering the
resources!

&

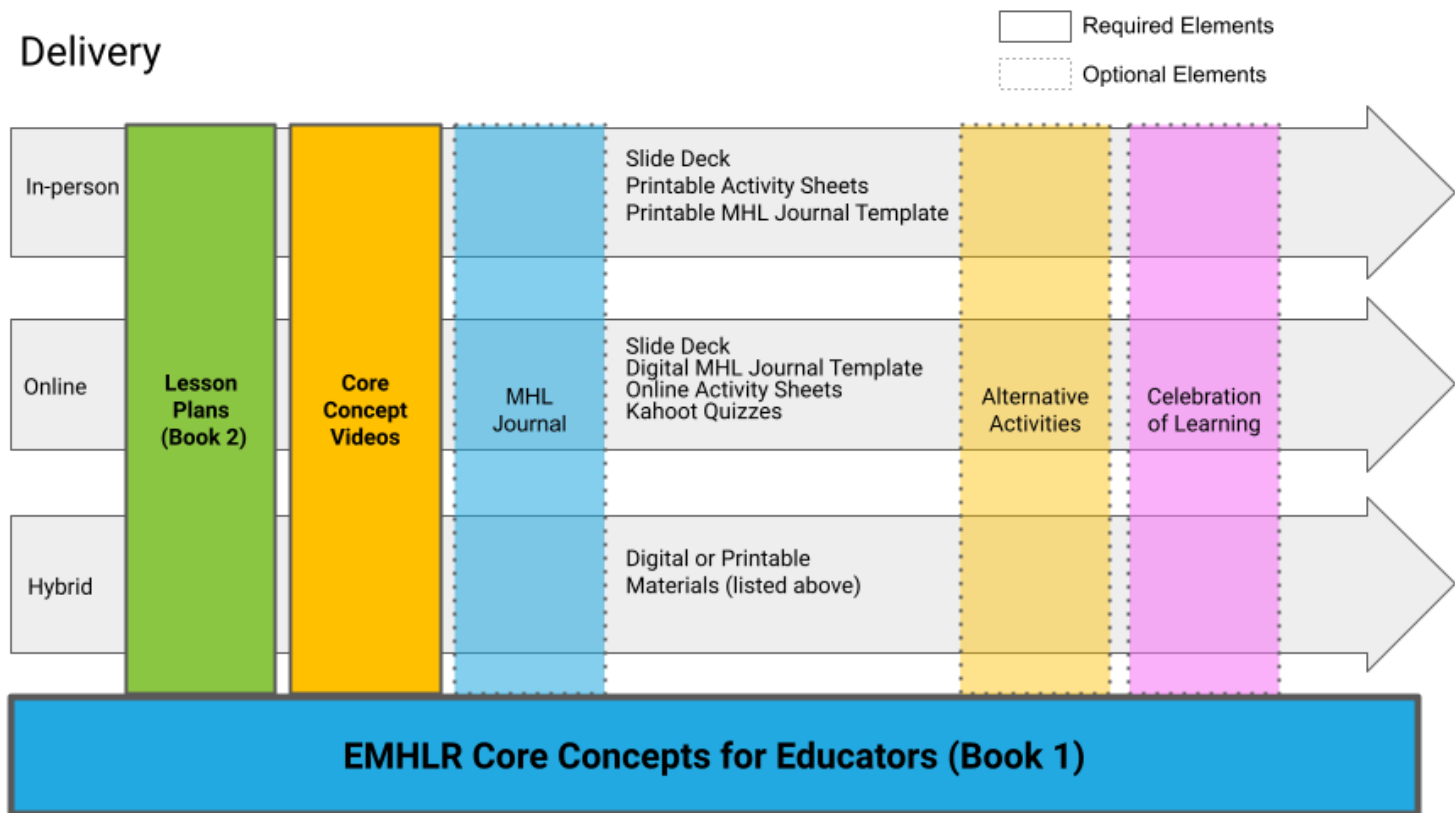
Don't skip the
videos!

Each module contains the following:

- **Conceptual Knowledge** - The key concepts to be conveyed to students
- **Procedural Knowledge** - The competencies students should achieve after completing the module
- **Handle With Care** - Areas of consideration for potentially sensitive topics
- **Core Concept Videos (required)** - The videos illustrate the core concepts and create the foundation for the activities and lessons. They are required viewing as all of the core concepts are covered in the videos.
- **Mental Health Literacy Journal (optional)** - The prompts are threaded through all 6 modules; printable and digital templates are provided
- **Module Activities (with digital adaptations)** - Step by step instructions to engage students and reinforce the core concepts. Digital Delivery suggestions are appropriate for online delivery and in-person delivery with the use of technology (see [Appendix A](#))
- **Alternative Module Activities** - Additional choices offered to adapt to students' needs and / or teaching style

Upon completion of the 6 modules, the EMHLR provides 'Celebration of Learning' activity choices to consolidate the core concepts.





How long does it take to complete the EMHLR?

The EMHLR can be applied as a classroom resource within existing curriculum frameworks to enhance the mental health literacy of both students and teachers. Various resources have been developed to help educators apply the EMHLR as part of a curriculum component within an appropriate subject area. It is recommended to teach it as a block (six modules taught consecutively over a period of 8 to 12 classroom hours). Each module is designed to be completed within 50 minutes of classroom time except for Module 4 (addressing specific mental / neurodevelopmental disorders), which itself requires 3 to 5 classroom hours.

Are teachers required to take training to implement the EMHLR?

The book, [Core Concepts for Educators \(Book 1\)](#), serves as the foundational learning and training material to prepare educators to deliver the EMHLR in their classrooms. In addition to Book 1, we have many supplemental learning resources for those wishing to take a deeper dive into the concepts and increase their confidence. Please visit the mental health literacy curriculum website (mhlcurriculum.org) to access these additional materials. The MHL team is also standing by to respond to any questions and offer support.

What are the connections between the EMHLR and current school curriculum?

The EMHLR can be taught within an appropriate subject area that shares similar learning outcomes for the EMHLR. The educational jurisdiction in each province and territory in Canada may require Grades 4 to 6 students to complete different subjects.

You may match the learning outcomes of the required subjects designed for Grades 4 to 6 students in your region with those of the EMHLR and identify strategies to embed the EMHLR into your current school curriculum.

Please refer to your provincial / territorial Grades 4 to 6 subject learning outcomes for possible matches with the EMHLR core concepts. We have created a Cross-Canada Curricular Alignments interactive tool to assist you with this process: <https://mhlcurriculum.org/654654123-2/emhllr-curriculum-alignments/>.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning offer a valuable lens to explore the learning in these modules:

<http://www.fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning/>

“ Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

~ First Nations Education Steering Committee in British Columbia



Pre-Module Steps

Establish Safety:

- ☐ Send an email / letter home re: upcoming mental health literacy instruction (see sample provided in [Appendix B](#)).
- ☐ Inform relevant staff about the MHL learning content being delivered that may be triggering for some students.
- ☐ Have a contingency plan available in case a student needs to leave during group instruction.
- ☐ Do frequent check-ins to see how students are doing with the content.
- ☐ Pay special attention to students with mental / neurodevelopmental disorder diagnoses to gauge how they are interacting with the content.
- ☐ Consider using an anonymous question box to see how students are experiencing this topic (e.g. encourage them to mention anything they're wondering about, want to share with you, want to delve into further, etc.).
- ☐ Review [Appendix F](#) (When Sensitive Topics Arise in Classroom Discussions: Tips for Teachers).
- ☐ **Establish ground rules for learning about and discussing mental health.** Include: respectful discussion, no sharing about someone else by name (e.g. prefer 'I have a friend who...' or 'I know someone who'...), no such thing as a dumb question, we laugh *with* each other not at each other, right to pass, etc. Emphasise that students can reach out to a teacher, counsellor or trusted adult if they have any questions or concerns about what they are learning.



Consider:

☐ **Delivery medium**

The EMHLR materials have been designed to be delivered in face to face settings, remotely or in hybrid environments. Materials and activity sheets can be printed out or completed digitally by students on devices. (see [Appendix E](#) for download instructions)

☐ **Assessment**

Many of the activities in this guide are open-ended. You may want to build criteria as a class for student projects and activities. This will allow students to consider what they would like projects to include while ensuring that both teacher and students are clear on assessment. Remember: Not all learning has to be assessed!

☐ **Journaling**

Consider the use of a **MHL Journal** (digital or paper copy) for students to illustrate their learning as they proceed through the modules. The journal can be personalised by students and used as a space to reflect on learning, to document helpful strategies, or integrated with other curricular areas (e.g. Language Arts, Health, Art) to help meet cross-curricular learning outcomes. Look for MHL Journal Prompts with suggestions throughout the lessons.

☐ **Beginning each lesson with a stress reduction technique**

Introduce calming strategies such as box breathing, mindfulness, guided visualisation, progressive muscle relaxation, etc. This will help focus students for the lesson and introduce them to a variety of stress management approaches. (Remember that many of the free resources are just as effective as higher cost interventions).

A few examples:

- Stress Explained - Elementary Edition (a MHL resource):
<https://youtu.be/k8FiAxAqqYE>
- Supporting Emotional Wellbeing in Children: Belly Breathing:
<https://youtu.be/x7mtVmKcAxw>
- Just Breathe by Julie Bayer Salzman and Josh Salzman:
<https://youtu.be/RVA2N6tX2cg>

☐ **Aligning the EMHLR with other subjects and curricular resources**

(e.g. art project, novel, study etc.)

