

## Counsellor's Corner

### Student Mental Health

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is defined as *"a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."*








It seems that we are seeing more students all the time who are struggling with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, decreased resilience, less capacity to problem solve and handle typical, everyday situations, difficulties focusing, increased suicidal ideation, etc.

So what do we need and what can we do to help kids develop good mental health? Below is a visual and some descriptors developed by Dr. Dan Siegel and Dr. David Rock of 7 essential daily activities that have been identified for optimal brain development and good mental health:

### The Healthy Mind Platter



*The Healthy Mind Platter, for Optimal Brain Matter*

-  **Focus Time**  
When we closely focus on tasks in a goal-oriented way, taking on challenges that make deep connections in the brain.
-  **Play Time**  
When we allow ourselves to be spontaneous or creative, playfully enjoying novel experiences, which helps make new connections in the brain.
-  **Connecting Time**  
When we connect with other people, ideally in person, or take time to appreciate our connection to the natural world around us, richly activating the brain's relational circuitry.
-  **Physical Time**  
When we move our bodies, aerobically if possible, which strengthens the brain in many ways.
-  **Time In**  
When we quietly reflect internally, focusing on sensations, images, feelings and thoughts, helping to better integrate the brain.
-  **Down Time**  
When we are non-focused, without any specific goal, and let our mind wander or simply relax, which helps our brain recharge.
-  **Sleep Time**  
When we give the brain the rest it needs to consolidate learning and recover from the experiences of the day.

Below are some of the many things our school is doing to support student mental health:

**Focus:** School is naturally conducive to focus time – students are being presented throughout the day with information and activities in a variety of subject areas that require focus.

**Play Time:** Recess and centers provide students with opportunities for unstructured, imaginative play.

**Connecting Time:** Activities such as group work, sports, clubs, and sharing time in addition to recess, provide opportunities for students to connect with each other and the adults involved. We have also noticed an increase in face to face connection time among students since limits have been put in place regarding cell phone use in the school.

**Physical Time:** Physical education, intramural sports, interschool sports, recess, ski trips, canoe trips, camping trips, etc. provide many opportunities for students to engage in physical activity.

**Time In:** In many of our classrooms, mindfulness is being taught and teachers and students are engaging in mindfulness activities in the classroom.

The 7 essential daily activities are not just for kids, these are things all of us need to for good mental health. We can support our children to develop good mental health by engaging in activities daily that fit under each of these areas to support our own mental health as well as providing opportunities and support for our kids to engage in these activities daily to support their mental health.

**Resources:**

[http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/healthy\\_mind\\_platter/](http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/healthy_mind_platter/)

<https://myhealth.uncc.edu/mental-wellness>

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