

# TIME FOR HEALTH



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**EXPLORING HEALTH TODAY** can be confusing and frustrating, and trying to teach health in a meaningful way can be overwhelming. Exercise, sport, sleep, nutrition, sex... are we mentally healthy? These are thoughts that might come to mind when thinking about physical and health education (PHE).

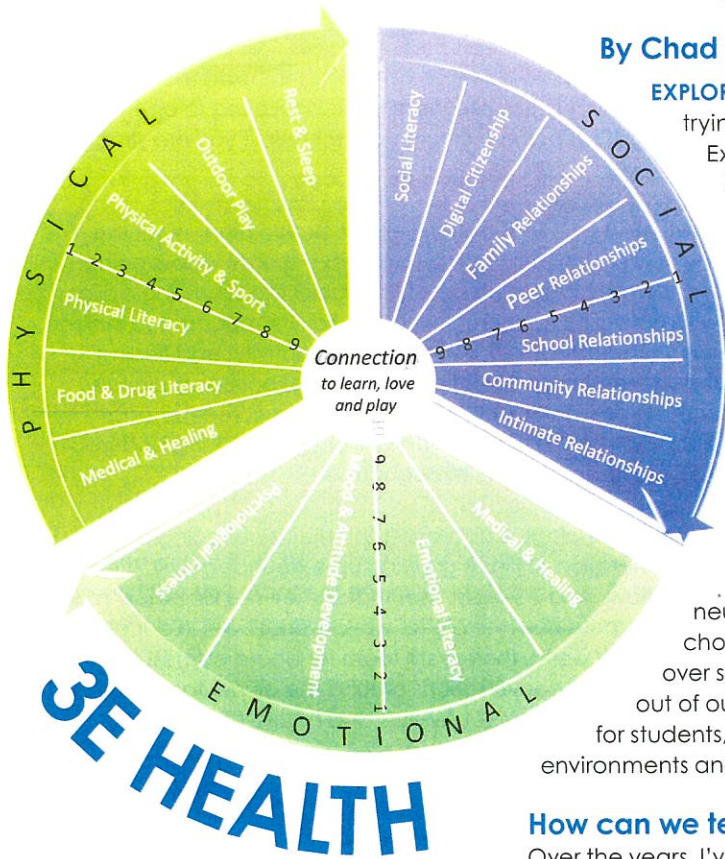
### What is health?

Everything around us and in us is connected; this is the root of health. The interrelated components that make up the foundation of our health are social, emotional, and physical in nature. The 3E Health graphic (pictured left) summarizes ways of socially, emotionally, and physically empowering health. Curricular connections to these components in school create conditions for health and ultimately learning.

These components are influenced by four factors of human health: 1) genetics, 2) the internal self-regulation of our organs, neurons, and cells, 3) the environments we live in, and 4) our lifestyle choices. Depending on our circumstances, we may have control over some of these factors of human health, but others are completely out of our control. None of us have any control over our genetics. And for students, there are many inequities that can affect their control over their environments and lifestyle choices.

### How can we teach health?

Over the years, I've learned that teaching health is not as much about knowledge and resources, but rather making time for social, emotional, and physical activities that nurture health in the classroom and our personal lives. How do we make or take time to teach meaningful health with busy classroom schedules and personal lives? The good news is, everything we already do and every subject we teach is potentially a health class.



# 1.

## Reduce stress

School can mean safety, challenge, reward, and belonging to some, yet for others school may bring unhealthy stressors to light in the form of insecurities, shame, trauma, and/or inequities that exist in individuals and society. It is heartbreaking when students are unable to succeed or thrive in class.

When I watched students struggling to succeed in my PHE, foods and nutrition, career education, and leadership classes, I did not see a lack of ability in these students, but rather a lack of health. Students are often avoiding stressors in their social, emotional, and physical health, which translates into learning challenges in the classroom.

Chronic unhealthy stress ultimately affects the body's internal self-regulation for health. Lack of control, uncertainty, and lack of information are three of the leading causes of chronic stress. So how do we reduce this unhealthy stress in our students? In my classroom, I work on creating a supportive environment socially, emotionally, and physically by first creating a democratic classroom that allows students to have ownership and control over how we make decisions as a class. Next, our classroom routines and expectations are clear and consistent, which provides students with certainty and information. We don't want learning to be a surprise or forced. We want to foster healthy levels of stress and challenge that provide personal insight toward health.

# 2.

## Build self-awareness

We can't always control the factors that affect our health, but we can build self-awareness and understanding of how health factors affect us. Building self-awareness into our students' lives is hard, as this means sometimes taking individuals to difficult places, but this is the starting point for building healthier students.

My approach for self-awareness begins with three expectations: 1) to do and use positive language, 2) to be and share positive energy, and 3) to feel positive growth. Homework, tests, projects, presentations, fitness, play, and health are the "to-do" part that creates emotional experiences where we "use" positive language with ourselves and our peers. The second expectation asks students to reflect on what type of person they would like "to be" and how they can "share" that person with respect, honesty, and confidence in the classroom. And finally, we expect "to feel" positive physical and mental growth when we overcome challenges. It's important to acknowledge that the outcomes of these expectations are not always positive. Being ready for push back, conflict, disappointment, and failure is important and expected, but can build stronger self-awareness. The process of health is ultimately a circular journey, so whatever the outcome, we repeat and try again!

# 3.

## Get moving

Movement has made humans who we are. Before cars, trains, and planes, humans travelled and settled almost every corner of the world in social groups to find food and safety—all of which happened by moving our bodies. Now, in our domesticated society with limited time, PHE is where most movement happens in our schools, and for some students, it's the only place this happens. It's important to include movement in all curricular areas, so students can practise health throughout the day. For example, thinking critically and creatively with a friend during a walk and talk can build communication skills, and personal and social awareness, while diving deeper into any subject area.

As PHE educators we also need to find ways to teach nutrition, rest and sleep, medical and healing practices, physiology, sexual health, and mental health in our schools. But the question is, do we forgo movement to teach it in a colonial way (seated, quiet, and stationary)? Or can we look at finding ways to teach health through physical movement using behaviour education?

Behaviour education focuses on using personal insight to learn about the social, emotional, and physical effects of different actions and reactions. The best way to teach behaviour education is through play. Play helps children and adolescents learn critical social, emotional, and physical skills. Teaching health through play and physical movement creates experiences that facilitate social and emotional connections, personal challenges, growth from failure, and strategies to resolve social disputes, leading to healthy growth.

# 4.

## Make time for health every day

Can we take time to get outside for play, dance, sport, gardening, or just a walk? Can we take time to shop, prepare, cook, and eat with friends and family? Do we take time for rest and sleep? Do we make time to support our neighbors and volunteer in our communities? Do we take time to care for ourselves and our planet? Making time for health in our busy schools and busy lives is not easy, but we all need to do this.

I recognize that I am speaking from a place of social, emotional, and physical privilege when it comes to health, but with that I need to find time for health to support myself and my community. As citizens we need to challenge government, corporations, businesses, and school boards to give back time for health, because this time is for the health of our children and students. Physical and health education is one area to make time for health in schools, but we all need to find time for health in our classrooms, schools, and busy lives, which is where the ultimate power and pathway for health lies. 9