

Information Guide

# CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL WELL-BEING RESOURCES



INTRO

PARTICIPATION

PLAY

SAFETY

SOCIAL

Introduction / Background

**START  
HERE**

# WHAT IS THIS INFORMATION GUIDE? WHO IS IT FOR?

The purpose of this information guide is to highlight the ways that local governments impact the mental wellness of children and youth and to describe the roles, assets, and mechanisms within local governments that promote well-being for this age group.

The guide includes research, examples, and resources to inform and inspire the strengthening of local governments' awareness of how they impact these citizens and how to support action in this realm for optimal societal outcomes.

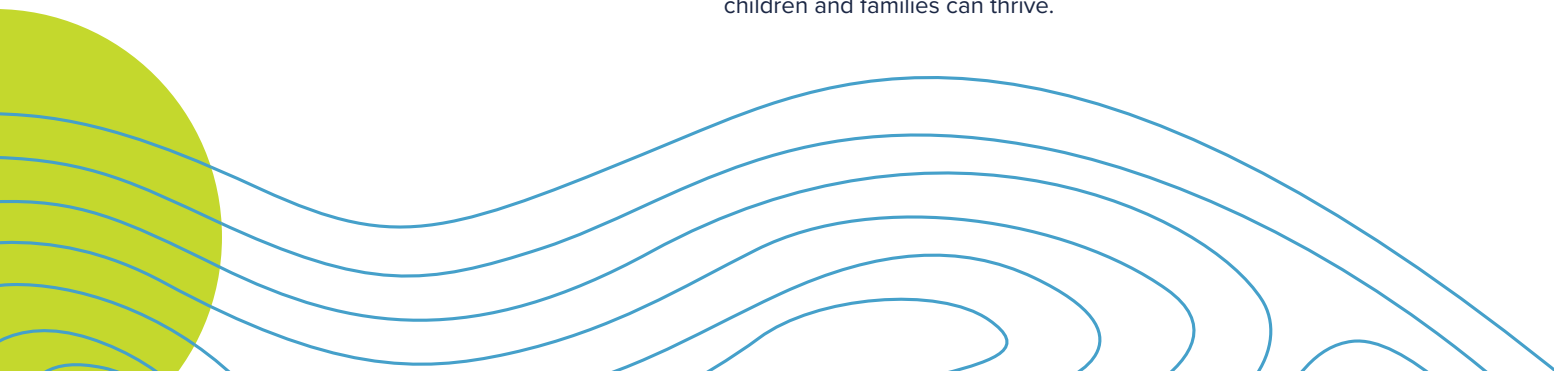
## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The four Protective Factors sections in this report look at factors that promote child and youth mental wellness, focusing on realms that local governments significantly influence and realms that were either negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic or highlighted during the pandemic as particularly strong protectors of young people's well-being.

**The Protective Factors that will be covered are:**

- **Social connection and belonging**
- **Play**
- **Safety**
- **Participation**

There are many protective factors that are important for children and youth mental well-being. The four covered in these information guides were chosen because they are powerful influencers on well-being and ones that local governments can greatly impact within their existing roles and with the assets and mechanisms at their disposal. Other influencers such as parents and other public sector agencies also impact these factors which underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder communication and collaboration to most effectively create healthy communities in which all children and families can thrive.



# WHAT? WHY? HOW?

Each of the following sections will explore the “what,” “why,” and “how” of each protective factor. The “how” is meant to stimulate thought and discussion and provide inspiration rather than prescribing actions. Actions taken by local governments are dependent on their local context and on their priority issues, opportunities, available assets, and what has been tried in the past.

**Key points to keep in mind:**

- There is never just one solution.
- It is rarely just the purview of one local government department.
- It requires committed, sustained and appropriately resourced approaches.
- It often requires changes at several levels of the system.

*“Local governments play a critical role in improving the mental well-being of children and youth with effects that can last into adulthood. Take up the challenge, be bold, push beyond status quo, and collaborate with other sectors to create healthy and supportive communities for all young people.”*



# WHERE TO START?

The following information guide provides examples as to how local governments are taking action on protective factors that matter for children and youth mental well-being. These examples are meant to stimulate thought and discussion and to inspire action to go beyond status quo, informed by local contexts, available assets, and capacity to build on strengths, address gaps, and try new approaches. A good place to start may be...

## 1. ARTICULATE A COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- Articulating a commitment to the well-being of children and youth can be an important first step to set the foundation and guide action.
- E.g., The City of Auckland (New Zealand) created 7 goals for promotion of the wellness of young people under the banner of I Am Auckland:
  - i. I have a voice, am valued and contribute
  - ii. I am important, belong, am cared about and feel safe
  - iii. I am happy, healthy and thriving
  - iv. I am given equal opportunities to succeed and to have a fair go
  - v. I can get around and get connected
  - vi. Auckland is my playground
  - vii. Rangatahi tu Rangatira (All young people will thrive)<sup>1</sup>

## 2. CREATE A PROFILE OF CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL WELL-BEING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- Gain an understanding of the current status of child and youth mental well-being at the local level.
- Municipal and regional governments may consider using local, regularly collected, and easily accessed data sets such as:
  - i. Early Development Instrument
  - ii. Middle Development Instrument
  - iii. Youth Development Instrument
  - iv. Adolescent Health Survey

*Note, many data sources lack data stratified by socio-demographic variables that would help to identify where disparities are occurring.*

## 3. CREATE A PROFILE OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- Local governments would benefit from understanding the current picture of the protective factors outlined in these information guides. Many of the data points are already captured by the previously mentioned data sets.
- The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development framework Measuring What Matters for Child Well-Being and Policies lays the groundwork for improvements in child well-being measurement and identifies some key actions such as:
  - i. Increasing the regularity of data collection
  - ii. Reporting on a core set of indicators
  - iii. Strengthening capacity to collect data to better understand where disparities are occurring<sup>2</sup>

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 The 295 page document is for purchase here: <https://www.oecd.org/wise/measuring-what-matters-for-child-well-being-and-policies-e82fded1-en.htm>  
 OECD Dashboard: <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/child-well-being/data/dashboard/>



# HOW LOCAL GOVERNMENTS INFLUENCE

Child and Youth Mental Wellness



# ROLES, ASSETS, AND MECHANISMS

THAT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE THAT  
INFLUENCE AND IMPACT CHILD AND YOUTH  
MENTAL WELL-BEING

## PUBLIC REALM

The public realm – including parks, plazas, footpaths and other spaces that the public has access to – falls mostly within the purview of local governments. How these spaces are **designed, developed, maintained and activated** impacts children and youth's access, independence, feelings of belonging, safety, opportunities for play, social connectedness, and connection to nature.

## PLANNING AND PLACEMAKING

Using planning powers and processes, local governments influence new developments and community design. When local governments fail to use a child and youth lens in these processes, it can lead to negative consequences such as removing young people from the public realm, hindering independent mobility, limiting play to playgrounds, and exposing an environmentally sensitive age group to high levels of noise and air pollution. To effectively support the mental well-being of children and youth, local governments should take into consideration the needs of its youngest citizens and the protective factors that support their well-being.

Examples:

- Engage the target population and other stakeholders in planning and decision-making
- Use a range of datasets to understand strengths and gaps in assets



# INFRASTRUCTURE

Streets, sidewalks, lighting, public art and other civic infrastructure have traditionally been developed in ways that exclude or deter the development needs of children and youth. However, there are increasing examples of how towns and cities have rectified that situation by intentionally developing new and amending old infrastructure to promote social interaction, play and freedom for young people.

Examples:

- Streets that prioritize active transportation networks to destinations frequented by children
- Sidewalks that are wider with shade to enable play
- Youth-specific infrastructure such as skate parks
- Parking lots that are repurposed to parks

# AMENITIES

Overlapping with the Public Realm and Infrastructure, towns and cities offer many different types of amenities that support child and youth well-being. These include parks, playing fields, tennis and basketball courts, libraries, recreational facilities, community centres, childcare centres, family places, civic theatres, community halls, youth centres and spaces for non-profit organizations. While these are already important community assets, they need to be designed in ways that are welcoming to young people, provide the type of space that meets their needs, and are easily physically accessed (e.g., via walking or public transit). Barriers to access must also be addressed through:

- Free or low-cost programs
- Easy navigation
- Integration of design elements such as imagery and messaging that feel inclusive to all children and youth

# PROGRAMMING, EVENTS, EXPERIENCES

The types of programming that local governments often offer provide opportunities for children and youth to socialize, nurture their creativity, exercise, learn life skills, practice mindfulness, and build self-esteem. Civic initiatives such as festivals, free concerts, free access to art galleries and museums, pop-up events and other space activations can also be effective ways to provide children and youth with growth experiences and greater community engagement.

Key components to enabling positive child and youth development include ensuring that the kind of programming and experiences that young people seek are:

- Available, accessible, and equitable
- Informed by children and youth
- Delivered by skilled staff with experience working with this age group

# PARTICIPATION

Opportunities for children and youth to give back to and invest in their communities are important for their sense of agency and community belonging. **Participation in planning processes, on youth advisory councils, and other means of engagement** are important ways for children and youth to have their voices heard to shape the environments in which they live. Other participation opportunities with local government include **internships, mentorships, volunteering and employment** – all ways for young people to be involved with their local government, build leadership skills, connect with others, and feel like active agents of change in their communities.

# POLICIES

Most civic policies and strategies impact children and youth in some way. Integrating and increasing intentionality toward young people in those policies ensures that local government policies and actions support the well-being of their youngest citizens and do not inadvertently harm their healthy development. Cities that have seen positive results are those that have articulated a commitment to child and youth well-being and:

- Sustain that commitment with actions and budgets over time
- Set explicit goals and objectives
- Regularly monitor and report out on the state of children and youth
- Create a comprehensive child and youth friendly strategy (can be detrimental if they are myopic – e.g., just focused on recreation, keep actions for this age group contained within one local government department, or are separated out as a “nice to have” rather than a core part of city operations)

Local governments have many other policies and strategies that are integral to reducing stress on caregivers and families and these, in turn, help to reduce vulnerabilities for young people. Examples of policies that can significantly support the mental well-being of children and youth:

- Poverty reduction actions
- Childcare plans
- Climate change adaptation measures
- Community economic development

These policies can support caregivers by reducing toxic stress, ensuring access to basic needs, building protective factors, and reducing risks and barriers to positive child development.

# THE GREAT INFLUENCER

Local governments greatly influence the quality and equitable distribution of resources, environments, and conditions needed for healthy children and youth. No one action will solve the current mental wellness crisis amongst children and youth. The complexity of health and social issues requires a systems approach with cross-cutting and cross-sectoral action and collaboration. However, local governments are in a powerful position to provide the kinds of environments and experiences that could help this population group to thrive. While many local governments are already taking action to promote mental wellness for this age group, improvement is always possible. This might require local governments to do something new, more, or different. In other areas, local governments might need to stop doing something that is not helping or that is adding to the problem.

**FUNDAMENTALLY, CHANGE BEGINS WITH A STRONGER AWARENESS OF THE ISSUE, A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION, AND AN INCREASED INTENTIONALITY AND SUSTAINED COMMITMENT TO THE COMMUNITY'S YOUNGEST CITIZENS.**



# HOW LOCAL GOVERNMENTS BENEFIT

From Strengthening  
Child and Youth Mental Wellness

# “THE STATE OF THE YOUNG IN ANY CITY IS THE LITMUS TEST FOR A CITY’S LEVEL OF SUSTAINABILITY AND VIBRANCY”

– Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, former Executive Director of UN Habitat<sup>1</sup>

Large and small cities and towns in BC are experiencing an unprecedented number of complex social and environmental issues which have resulted in communities with increasing social discord, higher crime rates and anti-social behaviour, increasing inequality, decreasing social cohesion and a lower level of overall community vibrancy and resilience.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Part of an effective strategy to address some of these issues is to improve community well-being. This entails:

1. Strengthening the protective factors that reduce pain and alienation and that improve feelings of agency, safety, community belonging, and social connection.
2. Ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities that support everyone to flourish.

Investing in the well-being of younger age groups tends to yield a strong return on investment given that, more than any other time in human development, this age group is particularly impacted by their environments.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Through the science of epigenetics, it has been well established that the experiences of children can become biologically embedded, not only impacting their health and social development in childhood but also into adulthood.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>

Becoming a child friendly city can improve a city’s:

- Economic performance
- Its ability to attract and retain a skilled workforce
- Overall functioning

Investing in children and youth’s mental well-being could benefit communities and address local government priorities, including socio-economic issues, community safety, and overall community functioning.

# BELONGING

Young people with a strong sense of belonging are more engaged in their community, form positive social networks, and participate in activities such as fundraising and supporting organizations that help disadvantaged people.<sup>12,13</sup> A strong sense of belonging has also been linked to lower rates of adolescent suicide and problematic substance use.<sup>14,15</sup>

# SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion refers to the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a community. Children living in socially cohesive neighbourhoods experience lower rates of hyperactivity and aggression and are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour.<sup>16</sup> Social cohesion has also been associated with higher rates of child and youth physical activity, stronger feelings of safety, increased rates of community participation and higher levels of mutual respect among diverse groups of young people.<sup>17,18,19</sup>

# SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Social connectedness is a sense of belonging and a psychological bond a person may feel towards other people or groups. Resilient children and youth have at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive, trusted, adult.<sup>20</sup> Positive connections between children and youth and adults in their community:

- Promotes healthy emotional development
- Increases levels of life satisfaction and better decision-making skills which, in turn, are associated with lower levels of delinquent behaviour<sup>21,22,23</sup>
- Mitigates the negative impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Significantly increase school performance
- Lowers odds of alcohol use and involvement in violence in low resource neighbourhoods<sup>20,24</sup>

# SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital deals with shared group resources, like a friend-of-a-friend's knowledge of a job opening. Individuals have access to social capital through their social networks. For children and youth, higher levels of neighbourhood social capital, strong connections and feeling like a valued member of the community has been linked to:

- higher civic participation
- trust in others
- prosocial and helping behaviours
- better education outcomes
- lower crime rates<sup>25,26,27,28</sup>

# COMMUNITY SERVICE

Youth volunteerism and community service increases resiliency, prosocial thinking and behaviour, a sense of community belonging, social responsibility and overall levels of happiness and academic achievement.<sup>29,30</sup> Studies have also found that volunteering in childhood and adolescence is associated with lower crime and illegal behaviours in adulthood.<sup>31</sup>

# INCLUSIVE PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

Communities achieve better outcomes when the voices and competencies of diverse stakeholders – including children and youth – are involved in the identification, leveraging and mobilization of resources.<sup>32</sup> Young people's unique perspective and propensity for action has led to positive change in organizations and communities and has helped to address issues such as public safety and to improve assets such as transit and parks.<sup>33,34</sup> Child and youth involvement in planning, decision-making and local governance also develops their civic competence and fosters a greater commitment to their communities.<sup>35,36</sup>



# POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Positive youth development programs take a strengths-based approach, emphasizing youth engagement and contribution, belonging, safe space, skill building, positive norms, social-emotional competencies, community collaboration, and positive adult role models and mentors.<sup>37</sup> Positive youth development programming, starting at a young age, is associated with reduced poverty in adulthood, possibly aided by higher educational attainment and the resulting higher income.<sup>38,39</sup> Positive youth development programming has also been associated with an increased sense of social responsibility, stronger moral reasoning, and decreased juvenile delinquency.<sup>40,41</sup>

# STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

Young people's (particularly adolescents) participation in structured social, arts and recreational activities positively affects academic achievement and psychosocial and behavioural functioning, increases life satisfaction, lowers rates of depression and reduces delinquency.<sup>42,43,44</sup>

# UNSTRUCTURED PLAY

Unstructured play, particularly in early childhood, is very important to social-emotional development. Unstructured play functions as the means by which children regulate their emotions, exert self-control, problem solve, nurture creativity, and develop social skills – all of which are integral assets for well-being across the lifespan.<sup>45</sup> Developing self-regulation in children and youth is a key investment in society given that stronger self-regulation predicts higher income, better financial planning, and fewer risk behaviours such as substance misuse and violence.<sup>46,47</sup>

# NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFETY

When children and youth view their neighbourhoods as safe, they do better socially and emotionally, with higher levels of well-being, fewer internalizing problem behaviours (e.g., depression, anxiety) and fewer externalizing problem behaviours (e.g., aggression, substance use).<sup>48,49,50,51</sup> Young children's perceived safety is important because children develop a sense of self during their pre-school years, with more complex awareness and autonomy emerging around age seven.<sup>52</sup> During these key developmental years, children's perceptions of safety significantly impacts health-related behaviours such as physical activity and their corresponding outcomes such as lower levels of psychological distress.<sup>52,53,54,55</sup> For adolescents, studies show how lower levels of neighborhood safety disrupts academic achievement and functioning at school in addition to disrupting young people's lives more generally.<sup>56,57</sup>

**Promoting child and youth mental wellness is an effective, evidence-based measure to address core socio-economic issues and create healthier, more vibrant communities.**

- More than 180 mayors have signed on to UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Mayors' Declaration
- 100 mayors and senior staff from local governments from 30 cities joined the first cohort of the Urban95 Academy's Leadership Programme to strengthen knowledge on how to make communities better for the youngest citizens.

A child-friendly approach has the potential to benefit the broader population and to unite a range of forward-thinking agendas, including sustainability, safety, and resiliency.

*“Looking at planning and design through children's eyes does not just offer fresh perspectives and a compelling new urban vision. It reveals the best way to set cities on a firm course away from ecological, economic and social decay”*

– Tim Gill, Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design Can Save Cities<sup>58</sup>

Enrique Penalosa, former mayor of Bogota, famously called children an “indicator species” for cities, emphasizing that taking action to create supportive environments that promote the well-being for young people strengthens well-being for all citizens and produces a more sustainable and equitable society.<sup>59</sup> In British Columbia the wellness of our indicator species is trending in the wrong direction. Rates of anxiety, depression and aggression are high and worsening. Local governments have many different roles, assets, and mechanisms that could help to improve this situation to promote the mental well-being of its youngest citizens and to restore some balance to communities as a whole.

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Closing The Gaps

# POPULATION DISPARITIES



**Some groups within the child and youth population may experience disparities in the status of their mental well-being, as well as in the protective factors.** This section provides an idea of disparities, however, a more fulsome reflection at a municipal or regional level by age cohort, intersectionality, and trends over time is encouraged.

Many disparities in well-being are rooted in early childhood and as such it is critical to include action for the early years to ensure supportive environments in which all young children can thrive.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of whether a disparity is being caused by an inequity or something else, there should be an attempt to close any gaps in order to promote equal outcomes for the well-being of all young people.

*“the promise of adolescence is severely curtailed by economic, social and structural disadvantage....These potent societal determinants shape adolescents’ life trajectories in multiple ways. They not only reduce access to the opportunities, services and supports enjoyed by more privileged youth, but they also expose less privileged youth to risks, stresses and demands that ‘get under the skin’, adversely affecting the body and the brain during critical developmental periods.”<sup>2</sup>*

## SOCIO- DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

The following is a list of some socio-demographic factors that can be associated with lower levels of mental well-being as well as disparities in protective factors that promote the wellness of children and youth. It is not an exhaustive list but rather is meant to stimulate thought and discussion and to underscore the importance of considering and addressing disparities for the optimum development of all young people. It should also be noted that disparities are not a given and population groups that experience them may change over time, particularly when effective actions and systemic changes occur to address them.



# GENDER

## FEMALES

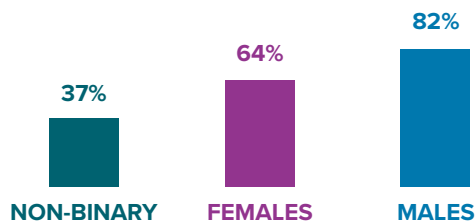
- Mental health issues tend to be more prevalent among young females than males.<sup>2</sup> Female children can sometimes encounter more barriers than their male counterparts to their everyday freedoms. There have been well-documented gender differences in children’s independent mobility.<sup>3</sup> Studies also show that boys are more likely to play outside than girls.<sup>4</sup>

## NON-BINARY

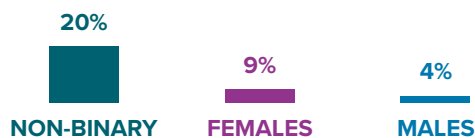
- Young people who identify as non-binary often have poorer mental health outcomes, with high rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.<sup>5</sup>
- Gender-diverse adolescents experience discrimination within the school environment from the curriculum, space, peers and teachers, as well as in strategies such as disclosure negotiation.<sup>6</sup>

Studies indicate that higher gender equity and self-esteem can improve the mental well-being and life satisfaction of school-aged children.<sup>8</sup>

### Adolescents who self-reported good or excellent mental health.<sup>7</sup>



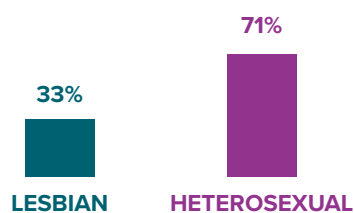
### Adolescents who did not participate in extracurricular activities in the past year because they were worried about being bullied.



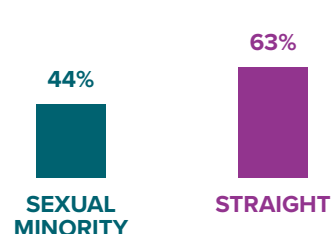
# SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Mental health issues are prevalent in the 2SLGBTQIA+ population, often due to the stigmatization and discrimination that they face at home, at school and in the broader community. Exposure to discrimination is associated with higher levels of stress as measured by elevated cortisol.<sup>2,9</sup>

**33% of lesbian girls self-reported good or excellent mental health compared to 71% of heterosexual girls.<sup>10</sup>**



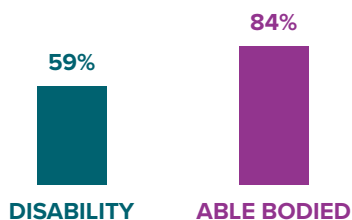
**44% of sexual minority girls feel like a part of their school compared to 63% of straight girls.<sup>10</sup>**



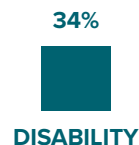
# DISABILITIES AND CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Children with disabilities or chronic illness are at increased risk of impaired social functioning, less peer acceptance, social isolation, and more school absenteeism.<sup>11,12,13</sup>

**59% of youth with a disability self-reported good or excellent mental health compared to 84% of youth without a disability.<sup>14</sup>**



**34% of youth with a disability reported that their disability or chronic condition prevented them from doing things their peers could do.<sup>7</sup>**



# INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Indigenous children and youth face high levels of mental health problems, including higher levels of depression and attempted suicide.<sup>15,16,17</sup>

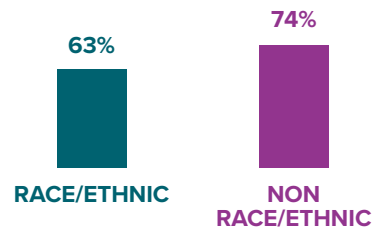
**Urban Indigenous youth who feel like a part of their school are more likely to:**

- ✓ **feel hopeful for the future,**
- ✓ **pursue post-secondary education,**
- ✓ **feel safe getting to and from school.<sup>18</sup>**

# RACE AND ETHNICITY

Greater perceptions of racial/ethnic discrimination are linked to more depressive and internalized symptoms; greater psychological distress; poor self-esteem; less academic motivation; and greater engagement in externalizing behaviours.<sup>19</sup>

**63% of youth who have experienced racial or ethnic discrimination self-reported good or excellent mental health compared to 74% of youth who had not.<sup>20</sup>**





# NEW IMMIGRANTS

Children and youth from refugee backgrounds can be significantly vulnerable to mental, emotional and behavioural disorders due to exposure to war, human rights violations and severe deprivation abroad.<sup>21</sup>

**New immigrant children and youth may struggle with a new culture and language, new school system and new social and peer norms which can present barriers to feeling socially connected and socially supported which can cause stress and isolation.<sup>22,23,24</sup>**

# LOW INCOME

On average, children growing up in low-income households have poorer social, behavioural and cognitive outcomes, with lower self-esteem, and higher levels of stress.<sup>25,26,27</sup>

**Children in low socio-economic neighbourhoods may have less access to physical activity resources such as parks, trails and community centres, and even when they are available, low-income children use them less frequently than their peers in higher socio-economic status neighbourhoods.<sup>28</sup>**

**Poverty intensifies loneliness and social isolation, particularly given the impact that lack of money has on the ability to take part in social activities and to access transportation, as well as the sense of shame, powerlessness, lack of agency and hopelessness that poverty often instills in individuals.<sup>29,30</sup>**

# WHERE TO START?

As a first and ongoing step, local governments could identify and monitor where disparities are happening in their community and then involve the affected populations in further discussion to better understand the root causes of the disparities.

While participation in planning is important for children and youth overall, it is particularly important for groups who are facing additional barriers. If actions do not take into account what those barriers are, they can further exacerbate disparities.

## ASK THREE QUESTIONS:

*(adapted from National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine)<sup>2</sup>*

**1**

**What is generally expected in terms of the extent that children and youth can achieve well-being in physical, social, cognitive, and behavioural domains for their age?**  
(i.e., measuring overall population outcomes)

**2**

**What is the extent to which members of different social groups achieve those levels of well-being?**

**3**

**What is the extent to which members of different social groups have had equal and equitable chances to achieve desirable development outcomes?**

Disparities in child and youth outcomes by socio-demographic variables will translate into inequality in adult outcomes unless steps are taken to reduce them. Research shows that reducing risk factors, increasing protective factors and strengthening the resilience of children and youth can effectively close the gaps.

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INTRO

PARTICIPATION

PLAY

SAFETY

SOCIAL



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# QUALITY ADULTS IN CHILDREN'S LIVES





**The adults in children's lives have a substantial impact on their mental well-being.**<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

Adults support the mental well-being of children and youth by providing psycho-social support, including deep listening, buffering stress, and positive role modeling and by providing opportunities for young people to build social-emotional competencies and other development assets, including through the creation of enabling environments and the promotion of the four realms of protective factors outlined in this information guide.

*“High levels of support from any trusted adult in childhood, regardless of relationship, halves the prevalence of low mental well-being amongst adults who experience high levels of childhood abuse and adversity compared to those who experience adversity but with no such adult support.”<sup>5</sup>*

**EXAMPLES OF ADULTS  
YOUNG PEOPLE  
INTERACT WITH FROM  
LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:**

- Youth Workers
- Librarians
- Planners
- Engineers
- Police
- Elected Officials

## UNICEF'S REPORT CARD<sup>6</sup>

### IN CANADA

26% of children said that they did not feel supported by their family

26%



### IN NORWAY AND THE NETHERLANDS

6% of children said they did not feel supported by their family

6%



There are a wide variety of adults in children's lives, with the makeup of the adult contingent shifting as children grow older. With "increasing age, the neighbourhood evolves as a further ecological niche in which children spend time; just like the school setting, the community context is particularly significant because it can influence all young people."<sup>7</sup>

### EARLY YEARS



Most important adults are parents and caregivers, including childcare providers.

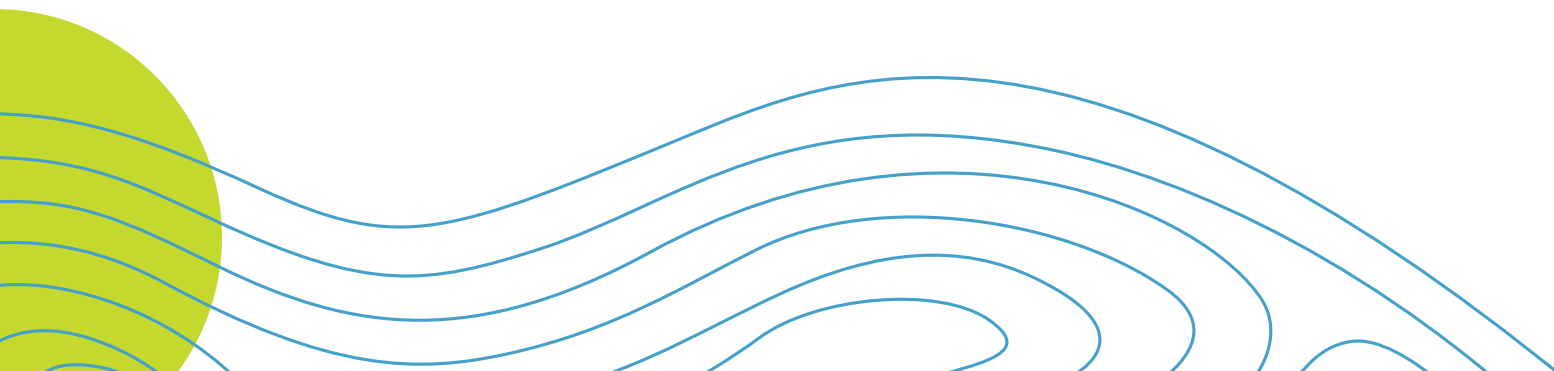
### MIDDLE CHILDHOOD



As children age, their world expands to include adults in school, recreation centres, and the broader community.

### ADOLESCENCE

The importance of non-parental adults and adults outside of the family is positively related to healthy emotional development, especially during early and middle adolescence.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>



## TO ENABLE HIGH QUALITY ADULTS IN CHILDREN'S LIVES IT IS IMPORTANT TO:

### FACILITATE AND PRACTICE SELF-CARE

There is a clear association between measures of caregiver well-being and that of their child.<sup>12</sup> Caregiver stress during a child's early years is a risk factor for mental health problems in children and youth.<sup>13,14,15,16,17,18,19</sup> Modelling the use of social-emotional skills, managing stress, modulating emotional responses, and creating positive interactions with others, as well as other health promoting behaviours such as good nutrition, physical activity, maintaining social connections, and getting sufficient sleep.

### DEVELOP SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND SOCIETAL SUPPORTS

Family-friendly communities that are affordable, equitable, connected, vibrant and safe. Family-friendly policies are a key ingredient in good public policy (e.g., reducing family poverty and income inequality and improving childcare and parental leave policies).<sup>20</sup>

### TRAIN ON HOW TO SUPPORT THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Training and development for local government staff and elected officials could be quite varied, depending on the level of existing knowledge, one's role, and the amount of current engagement with the target population. For example, the training needs of youth workers experiencing compassion fatigue will be different from building the knowledge base of planners in participatory evaluation processes or the skills of elected officials in authentic youth civic engagement.<sup>21,22,23,24</sup> As such, part of a municipal plan to better support the mental well-being of children and youth may include identifying the full contingent of staff and elected officials who are currently engaging young people or who are not but perhaps should be and assessing where the current strengths are in professional skills and experience and which gaps to address.

UNICEF Canada's *Where Does Canada Stand* report calls for reducing the stress of parents, caregivers and other adults in children's lives and creating supportive household and community environments.<sup>25</sup>



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