CATHOLIC VIRTUAL ONTARIO

CVO – GROWING TOGETHER IN FAITH

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN THE CATHOLIC VIRTUAL CONTEXT

Catholic Virtual Learning Resource

Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association

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A PRAYER FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Jesus Christ, King of the Universe,
To you we turn in humble prayer.
Look with favor upon all young people,
bearers of hope for the Church and the world.
Jesus Christ, companion
of youth and young adults,
bless the paths of discovery and discernment,
through times of joy and experiences of hardship,
with the constant love and support of your Church.
Jesus Christ, alive in the hearts
of all your people,
grant that we may
'journey together, young and old…
to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge,
awaken prophesies and enable hope to blossom.'
Jesus Christ, Redeemer of all humankind,
open our hearts to encounter all young people,
to accompany and be in community together,
and as one Church, embark upon our holy mission.
Jesus Christ, in the company
of the Father and the Holy Spirit,
graciously hear our prayer
and be with us forevermore.

Amen.
USCCB, 2020

"Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."

— St. Catherine of Sienna

A SHARED WORLDVIEW

As teachers in Catholic schools, we share a unique worldview grounded in service and community. Through our professional practice, guiding students with our hearts and minds, the broader community, both present and future, also benefits. The learners we empower will eventually contribute to society through their own endeavours, continuing a pattern of flourishing and love.

A SHARED COMMITMENT

Regardless of the specific role we have in education at any given time, we are all educational leaders. Educating youth unites responsibility with service, a transformative element of our vocation. In fact, teaching is a profession that fosters all others, motivating students to apply learning meaningfully as life-long, engaged and contributing citizens.

Grounded in Gospel values, Catholic education nurtures an inclusive learning culture of high expectations for all learners across all learning environments. Diversity is championed as a strength, so that students with different backgrounds and experiences are collectively inspired to achieve to their unique potential and promote the common good. Created in God's image, all learners matter.

"Each person reflects the light of God."
– Blessed Carlos Acutis

WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) describes the process of developing and practising skills that help us thrive and contribute throughout life.[2]

Students learn to apply social and emotional learning (SEL) skills throughout the K-8 Ontario curriculum so that they are empowered to foster their own well-being and positive mental health, strengthening their ability to learn and thrive. As social and emotional learning skills are developed along with the interconnected six learning skills and work habits of responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative and self-regulation, students are better equipped to respond to and overcome life challenges.[3]

Because research shows that developing social and emotional learning skills during instruction contributes to student well-being and students achieving to their full potential, the curriculum addresses:

- **Identifying and managing emotions** to express their feelings and the feelings of others
- **Coping with stress** to develop resilience
- **Positive motivation** that builds hope and an interest in reaching goals
- **Building relationships** that support healthy interactions and respect diversity
- **Deepening a sense of self** to develop an understanding of their identity and experience a sense of belonging
- **Thinking critically and creatively** to enhance decision-making and problem solving

With the relationship between learning and believing so central to Catholic education, there are many other resources that shape instruction in Catholic schools. Used collectively with Ministry documents, they reinforce how "knowing, teaching, and learning are grounded in sacred soil".[2]

"Educating is between the mind, the heart and the hands: in harmony, to the point of thinking what I feel and do; feeling what I think and do; of doing what I feel and think. It's a balance."
– Pope Francis

OUR DIRECTION

The Catholic virtual learning environment incorporates social and emotional learning skills into teaching and learning so that the lived experience of a connected Catholic education community flourishes and endures. Teachers of curriculum in Catholic courses recognize how Catholic education is defined not by physical walls, but by the learner entrusted in their care, at the centre of their practice.

This philosophy reflects the divine pedagogy of God. As Jesus walked alongside the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, He reverently cared for the physical, emotional and social needs of His beloved friends while revealing Himself in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:13-32). In this way, God illuminates the priority of caring for body, mind and spirit equally in the communal building of the Kingdom.

"Becoming a saint means becoming more fully yourself, becoming what the Lord wished to dream and create, and not a photocopy. Whereas if you simply copy someone else, you will deprive this earth, and heaven too, of something that no one else can offer." — *Christus Vivit, §162.*

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND ADOLESCENCE

As a transition between childhood and adulthood, adolescence is a time of significant physical, intellectual, social and emotional changes, including:

- Maturing capacity to think and reason
- Heightened emotional responses
- Expanding socialization and greater importance of peer groups[4]

While adolescents develop their sense of self and navigate life experiences, teachers provide pastoral care and ministry throughout the learning journey of their students. As a genuine instrument of the Church, Catholic schools have a tremendous opportunity to bring meaning into these experiences of adolescent development, fostering a life-long journey with Christ as a companion, and guide.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING, ADOLESCENCE AND THE VIRTUAL LEARNING CONTEXT

As practices demonstrating witness to God's love, teaching and learning across Catholic education contexts transcend space and time. This provides the reassurance that, whether learning occurs in physical buildings or through a virtual modality, the environment honours the social and emotional needs of all students. The members of the virtual learning 'village' interact in ways reinforcing the importance of social and emotional skills and providing multiple opportunities for understanding and application.

"All change, like the epochal change we are now experiencing, calls for a process of education and the creation of an educational village capable of forming a network of open and human relationships. That village should put the human person at the centre..."
– Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See for the Traditional Exchange of New Year Greetings

Approaching instruction from a social and emotional learning stance provides a coordinated approach to supporting student well-being. This proactive stance aligns with the shared Catholic worldview of the dignity of all learners and recognizes that learning in the virtual context requires strategies that individualize and differentiate instruction.

The following developmental maps outline emotional and social development indicators in adolescent learners (13 to 19 years old) as well as instructional strategies targeting each indicator.[5]

Emotional Development Indicator	Adolescent Learner Responses	Virtual Learning Environment Strategies
Increased emotional responses	• Heightened emotions • Mood fluctuations • Increased stress responses	• Post a course welcome message. • Co-create a Catholic Learning Community Agreement establishing clear, co-created expectations and learning community norms (e.g., Appendix 1). • Establish clear expectations for completing tasks, submitting assignments, assessment and evaluation practices that incorporate flexibility, with student input. • Create a survey to determine digital competencies and use the information to provide digital supports. • Conduct a virtual tour of the learning platform and demonstrate functionality and tools. • Schedule 'office hours' with the 'waiting room' function enabled. • Provide predictability and reassurance through timely messages about assignments. • Establish means for teacher-student communication, such as a spreadsheet timeslot sign-up. • Facilitate ice breaker activities. • Include video instruction that can be accessed and reviewed at different times. • Conduct scheduled check-ins. • Maintain student anecdotal records and review them to inform differentiated instructional strategies and supports.
Improved ability to self-regulate (stress management, relaxation, mindfulness)	• Improved ability to access thinking strategies, such as thinking optimistically, thinking positive thoughts, planning solutions or accepting outcomes • Ability to develop a toolbox of personal self-regulation strategies	• Embed opportunities for self-reflection, including journaling and prayerful pause such as the Ignatian examen. • Post Christian meditations, muscle relaxation and mindful breathing strategies; invite students to share strategies they find helpful. • Invite students to post their needs or petitions for themselves or that which burdens them and encourage the class to pray for those needs weekly.

Emotional Development Indicator	Adolescent Learner Responses	Virtual Learning Environment Strategies
Improved ability to interpret the implicit communication of others	• Ability to 'read' or interpret and understand the reactions of others, including fear and anger • Cooperation with others	• Post an introductory video of yourself in an asynchronous setting. • Invite students to post profile pictures or introductory videos and enable threaded responses. • Host meetings or check-ins with audio and video • Model how to communicate positive and constructive feedback, both orally and in written comments. • Provide collaborative group member choice.
Internalized motivation (growth mindset)	• Ability to set goals and remain on task with greater independence	• Model positive responses during class activities and on chats, discussion forums. • Highlight positive examples of online forum contributions. • Post and review the Institute for Catholic Education's (ICE) Responsible Digital Citizenship reflection poster (Appendix 2). • Co-create rubrics and invite students to identify a target level of achievement on assignments. • Allow opportunities for self-reflection and goal setting pre- and post-evaluation.
Continued empathy development	• Capacity for perspective-taking • Understanding of how perspectives are influenced by individual contexts, beliefs and background • Conflict resolution	• Encourage participation in live discussions and discussion boards using different comment tools. • Reinforce positive comments made during meetings, on the chat, etc., by repeating or commenting on them. • Provide opportunities for inquiry groups and collaborative assignments. • Incorporate peer review of tasks before students submit them for teacher assessment. • Incorporate peer assessment and evaluation opportunities.

Social Development Indicator	Adolescent Learner Indicators	Virtual Learning Environment Strategies
Exploration of identity (knowing oneself)	• Active exploration of identity; questioning and confirming values, considering career choices	• Ensure activities and assignments include elements open to personalization, areas/topics of interest choice and voice. • Invite students to identify influences on assignment final products, such as role models, interests, experiences. • Provide students with means to explore how their interests mirror within the Catholic community, most especially in the lives of Catholic leaders and saints. • Schedule monitored peer discussion groups and forums.
Increased gender role flexibility	• Awareness of gender stereotypes • Recognition of fluidity of gender identity	• Ensure course content and discussions, posts, reflect and honour diversity. • Establish and model virtual learning culture that upholds the dignity of the human person, solidarity, the common good in alignment with Catholic Social Teaching. • Honour and encourage diverse opinions. • Provide gender-neutral descriptors and titles for God in prayer (e.g., Creator God, loving God).
Increased peer relationships and social group-esteem	• Engaging in strong friendships • Participation in social group activities and interest in learning more about the groups, through discussion, research, attending cultural events	• Provide choice of peer partners and groups for collaborative tasks. • Schedule peer academic support network opportunities, such as discussion boards and check-ins. • Celebrate the diverse ways students and collaborative groups engage with different tasks, create different products and offer different solutions. • Schedule socialization/networking breaks to strengthen relationships and a sense of community.
Exploration of spiritual beliefs	• Consideration of and exploration of spiritual beliefs	• Post a daily prayer, reflection, Scripture reading or other inspirational message and invite students to post a personal response or share a response in breakout rooms. • Invite students to sign up for a date on which to post a positive message for the group. • Invite students to share their personal faith identity; celebrate the diversity of faith traditions and how those values positively impact the world.

Social Development Indicator	Adolescent Learner Indicators	Virtual Learning Environment Strategies
More complex sense of self that is increasingly situation-dependent	• Awareness of how different contexts affect behaviour, such as being a leader among peers and nervous when meeting new people	• Encourage students to build upon strengths to overcome challenges. • Honour diverse and diverging opinions about topics. • Assign and rotate roles when students collaborate with peers. • Invite students to share how peer feedback helped inform improvements to assignments.
Improved self-appraisal skills (mattering, assertive communication)	• Ability to think critically and reflect • Recognize how others may perceive them differently	• Provide self-assessment opportunities. • Provide multiple opportunities for goal setting, before starting assignments and post-evaluation. • Have students identify strengths and reflect on how to overcome challenges.
Increased self-efficacy	• Greater belief in the ability to achieve goals	• Build choice into activities and assignments. • Amplify student voice by invite student feedback through exit tickets, surveys or focus groups to help inform how you can support their goals. • Include a 'Next Steps' area on rubrics for students to complete.
Declining self-esteem	• Confidence experienced in early adolescence decreases	• Focus on process when providing feedback. • Embed options into assignments to amplify student voice and choice. • Use student survey feedback to individualize activities and assignments according to personal interests and experiences.
Evolving family relationships	• Possible heightened disagreements with family members as sense of individuality and independence develops	• Ensure information about the course and ways of communicated is posted in an easily accessible area of the platform. • Embed flexibility into activities and assignments, such as deadline extension options.
Moral reasoning shifts to focus on maintaining order	• 'Law and order' focus	• Be conscious of your moral stances and how they are communicated directly or indirectly in course content and instruction. • Use the chat function and breakout groups to moderate discussions and debates to facilitate perspective-taking. • Connect course content to Catholic social teaching and doctrine where pastorally appropriate. • Highlight chats and discussion threads that demonstrate application of reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Social Development Indicator	Adolescent Learner Indicators	Virtual Learning Environment Strategies
Increased self-sufficiency (problem-solving skills, time management, organization skills)	• Greater interest in independence when making decisions about activities and relationships	• Provide a safe space that supports taking risk-taking, such as assuming greater autonomy for learning. • Embed opportunities for decision-making. • Ensure assignments are sufficiently flexible as to encourage students to apply individual interests and talents, such as logic, music, theories, digital art, graphic design.

Additional Strategies to Support the Social and Emotional Needs of Students in the Virtual Context

- ❒ Provide opportunities for intercession for one another and for the world.
- ❒ Connect the scope of learning to the lives of the saints and prominent Catholic leaders, especially those that highlight diversity and lived experiences of struggle. Two support resources include Saints Around the World and Pray for Us: *75 Saints who Sinned, Suffered and Struggled on their way to Holiness,* by Meg Hunter-Kilmer.
- ❒ Hold space within the Liturgical Year for self-reflection and renewal, especially during the changing of the seasons (e.g., Advent and Lent).
- ❒ Tackle tough questions of morality and ethics with pastoral compassion and great respect for the dignity of the learner, leaning on reputable and authentic Catholic sources as reference.
- ❒ Be aware of social-global issues that can affect the full and active participation of all learners. Create a safe place for students to share their concerns and speak candidly about that which may cause unwanted anxiety or fear.

Students accessing virtual learning may learn online, but they are not alone. Appendix 3 demonstrates how three integrated elements can build and sustain an overall deep sense of community in online learning environments.

"The encounter with Christ involves the person in his totality: heart, mind, senses. It does not concern only the mind, but also the body and above all the heart."
– Directory for Catechesis, §76

The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGEs) is a unique means through which Catholic education educates the whole child. When teachers model and incorporate skills outlined in the OCSGEs, and students are provided with multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate them throughout their learning, the entire teaching and learning community flourishes. Expectations such as a collaborative contributor, and a caring family member, for example, adds to a foundational safe and supportive learning culture that spans different Catholic education learning contexts.

Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations — A Vision of the Learner

1. A DISCERNING BELIEVER formed in the Catholic Faith community who celebrates the signs and sacred mystery of God's presence through work, sacrament, prayer, forgiveness, reflection and moral living.

2. AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR who speaks, writes and listens honestly and sensitively responding critically in light of gospel values.

3. A REFLECTIVE, CREATIVE AND HOLISTIC THINKER who solves problems and makes responsible decisions with an informed moral conscience for the common good.

4. A SELF-DIRECTED, RESPONSIBLE, LIFELONG LEARNER who develops and demonstrates their God-given potential.

5. A COLLABORATIVE CONTRIBUTOR who finds meaning, dignity and vocation in work which respects the rights of all and contributes to the common good.

6. A CARING FAMILY MEMBER who attends to family, school, parish and wider community.

7. A RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN who gives witness to Catholic social teaching by promoting peace, justice and the sacredness of human life.

When relationships in the Catholic virtual learning context are cultivated and nurtured, the learning community develops and thrives. Clear and co-created expectations that honour student voice and choice builds engagement, trust and autonomy and results in a sense of belonging. Reinforced, consistent routines embed predictability and security in the virtual space. When students feel safe and stable, they are more likely to develop the social and emotional learning skills empowering them to become reflective and caring, self-aware learners who make decisions, set goals and meet with success.

Young people will look to educators as a model for how to feel safe, grieve, celebrate, resist comparison, and more. As a discerning Catholic teacher, the mental health reflection activity may help solidify your understanding of how social and emotional learning intersects with teaching and learning in the Catholic virtual context (Appendix 4).

This posture of authenticity reflects the Catholicity of the virtual space. Jesus himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus, angered at the sight of injustice, and desired often to be amongst friends. Virtual learning communities are called to attend to the importance of relationships and complexity of human life so as to nourish the social and emotional development of all learners.

"What is needed, then, is an educational vision that can encompass a broad range of life experiences and learning processes, in order to enable young people, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities." **– Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See for the Traditional Exchange of New Year Greetings**

"It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal."
– Pope John Paul II, 15th World Youth Day

APPENDIX 1: CATHOLIC VIRTUAL LEARNING AGREEMENT

As an ethical and responsible Catholic learning community gathering in a virtual learning space, we commit to the following expectations that demonstrate our shared worldview:

- ❒ keeping a positive learner mindset, open to learning and sharing
- ❒ actively listening to speakers and honouring their words
- ❒ using the mute function when not speaking to limit background noise
- ❒ always using respectful language when speaking and adding comments through the chat function, discussion forums, threads and other tools
- ❒ keeping all comments productive, adding to discussion rather than shutting it down
- ❒ responding to ideas, comments and feedback from a place of openness and curiosity rather than judgment
- ❒ maintaining the dignity of others by respecting diverse opinions, agreeing or disagreeing respectfully with ideas rather than with the person sharing the ideas
- ❒ being mindful of how turning video on can help build community and solidarity
- ❒ respecting that people have different comfort levels with turning video on
- ❒ asking for advance permission to take pictures or make recordings

What other expectations can we add to enhance our virtual learning space?

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APPENDIX 2: #DIGITALCITIZENSHIP

#DiscerningBeliever

- ❒ I believe that God is always with me — even in my online activity
- ❒ I witness online to my experience of God's love expressed to me in Jesus Christ
- ❒ I rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance and conduct myself online as a Joyful Disciple
- ❒ I believe in forgiveness and am forgiving and never vengeful online

#EffectiveCommunicator

- ❒ I communicate clearly, honestly and with sensitivity while online
- ❒ I use my voice online to speak up for others and show I care about them
- ❒ I choose words that are life-giving when commenting or posting online
- ❒ I work to ensure that I can be proud of my online voice and digital reputation

#ReflectiveCreativeHolisticThinker

- ❒ I share my ideas in a respectful way
- ❒ I approach conflict online with knowledge, understanding and prayer
- ❒ I make wise choices and informed decisions when navigating online
- ❒ I use the internet to advocate for kindness, humility, love and hope in the world

#SelfDirectedResponsibleLifelongLearner

- ❒ I set goals and continually work to improve myself as a digital citizen
- ❒ I reflect on the digital footprint that my online activity creates
- ❒ I exercise Christian leadership online to set a positive example for others
- ❒ I maintain a healthy balance between my online and offline activities

#CollaborativeContributor

- ❒ I collaborate with others online
- ❒ I value everyone's work and use other's digitized media ethically
- ❒ I use my God-given gifts and talents when contributing online
- ❒ I use the online forum to build on my strengths and for the benefit of others

#CaringFamilyMember

- ❒ I treat all people online with respect as we are all created in God's image
- ❒ I represent myself well during my online interactions
- ❒ I recognize how my online activities affect my family and my school community
- ❒ I show care and respect for God's creation and everything in it

#ResponsibleCitizen

- ❒ I am a peacemaker in the digital world
- ❒ I stand up for what is right even when it's not popular
- ❒ I witness to the fact that all life is precious
- ❒ I advocate for a just and compassionate society

Institute for Catholic Education

"No one can face life in isolation…We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead."
– Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*

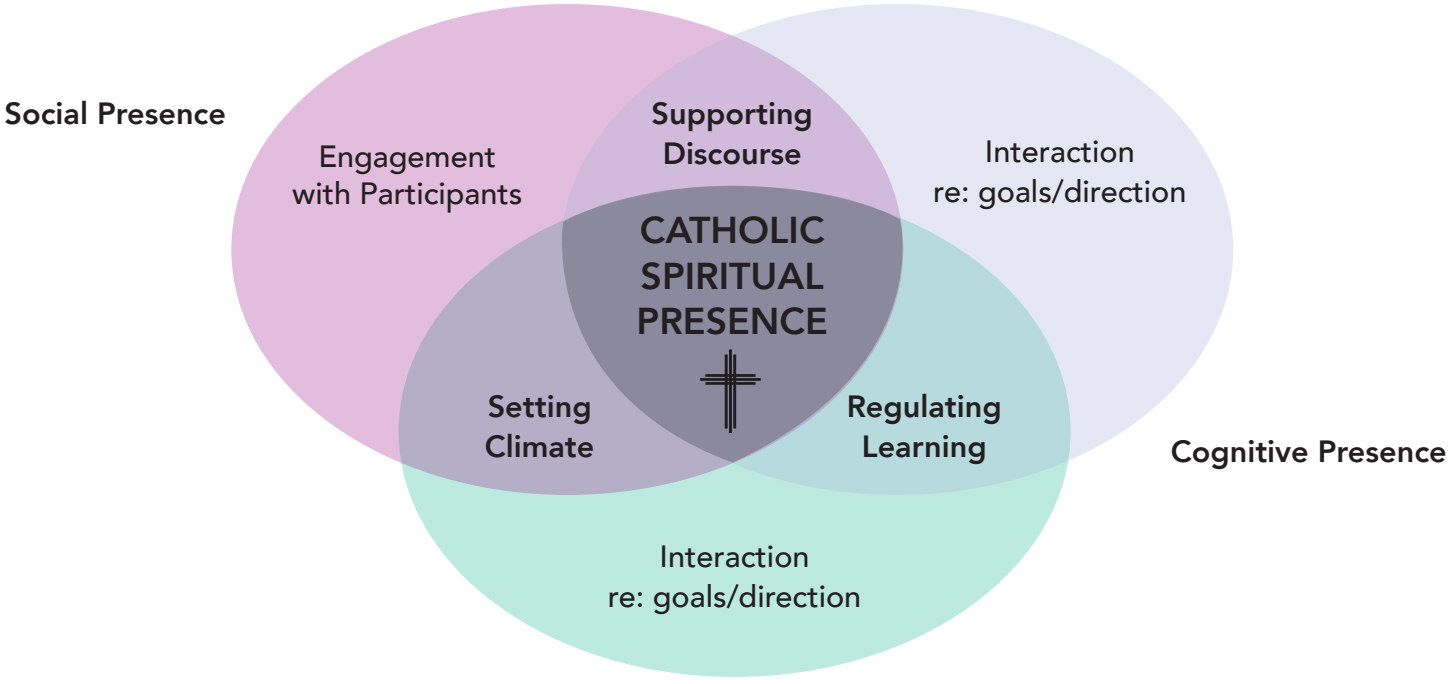
APPENDIX 3: NURTURING A CATHOLIC VIRTUAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Research indicates that a sense of community engages and supports students to a very high degree. Collaboration and shared learning, for example, provide learners with deeper connections to course content. As well, reciprocal learning fosters collaboration, solidarity and contributes to an overall positive educational experience. The Community of Inquiry (COI) framework outlines a process for establishing meaningful learning experiences by developing three distinct elements. A Catholic Community of Inquiry (CCOI) includes the additional sphere of Catholic Spiritual Presence that underpins the Social, Teaching and Cognitive elements: The teaching and learning environment demonstrates the Catholic worldview. Teaching and learning are dedicated to educating the whole child, as lifelong, discerning learners who receive multiple opportunities to apply and demonstrate the OCSGEs.

Social Presence: Effective and ongoing communication grounded in a safe and positive learning environment. Students are comfortable with and motivated to ask questions, share ideas and offer feedback respectfully and productively.

Teaching Presence: Giving and receiving feedback and information and engaging with students frequently. Students receive consistent and timely communication and confirm their understandings.

Cognitive Presence: Clear expectations are provided at the start of learning. Activities are collaborative, reflective and involve the consideration of different perspectives. Active reflection and self-assessment are encouraged throughout learning.



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"Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe." – Saint Augustine

APPENDIX 4: REFLECTION: THE FIVE COMPONENTS OF POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH, PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA[8]

1. **Ability to enjoy life:** Concepts such as happiness, fulfillment and perceived well-being. Factors related to personal characteristics and perspectives, perceptions of life and circumstances, the nature of family and social relationships and environments.

2. **Capacity to work through challenges:** Finding meaning during times of change, positively adapting to new contexts and collaborating to gather resources and enhance social support. Building on resilience, resources, meeting challenges or adversity.

3. **Emotional well-being:** The ability to recognize and analyze personal feelings, empathize. Managing and communicating emotions that generate positive interactions with self and others.

4. **Spiritual well-being:** Feeling connected with spiritual beliefs, values or faith. A sense of calling, purpose and meaning that is an important influence in our lives.

5. **Equity, respect for cultures, and dignity within social environments:** Social and environmental values and practices contributing to autonomy to pursue goals and make decisions. Quality social connections and environments that promote equity, respect for cultures, social justice and personal dignity.

How do these components relate to teaching a Catholic online course and how am I infusing them with a Catholic virtual teaching and learning community?

Take time to reflect on the ways structures and broader social realities may be impacting your own mental health. How can this self-reflection initiate conversations with young people about the systems and structures that impact their mental health and removing those barriers?

"Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest things right, and doing all for love." – St. Thérèse of Lisieux

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CATHOLIC VIRTUAL ONTARIO

CVO – GROWING TOGETHER IN FAITH

Our Mission

Catholic Virtual Ontario provides equity of access for Catholic secondary students to take secondary credits developed and taught by Catholic teachers.

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