

Evaluation of “Bell Let’s Talk in the Classroom”: A Guide for Improving Teachers’ Confidence in Providing Mental Health Education



Highlights

- Bell Canada commissioned the development of the Let’s Talk in the Classroom (LTIC) Guide to provide teachers with the education and support needed to implement three mental health-related lesson plans at the grade 7/8 level.
- The LTIC Guide was designed with three goals in mind:
 1. Increase teachers’ confidence in delivering mental health lessons to students.
 2. Decrease teachers’ worries about discussing mental health in the classroom.
 3. Improve teachers’ mental health education.

What is this article about?

The Mental Health Strategy for Canada highlights the role of schools in mental health promotion. While teachers are recognized as the first point of contact for students, few studies have addressed outcomes at the teacher level, including their confidence in delivering mental health-related content to students.

Bell Canada commissioned the development of the Let’s Talk in the Classroom (LTIC) Guide to provide teachers with the education and support needed to feel confident delivering mental health content in the Grade 7/8 classroom. This preliminary evaluation explores the acceptability, feasibility, and utility of the LTIC Guide using a mixed methods approach.

LTIC Guide

The LTIC Guide was co-developed by team members from Western University, School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON), Kids Help Phone, Media Smarts, and Bell Let’s Talk. A research team from Queen’s University conducted the evaluation of the resource. The LTIC Guide was delivered through an online platform and was estimated to take teachers 10 hours to complete. It included four modules: (1) an introduction to the goals and structure of the Guide; (2) an overview of the concepts of mental health and well-being, as well as stigmatizing language and its impact; (3) an overview of the educator’s role in promoting a mentally healthy classroom; and (4) guidelines for developing a strategy to teach three mental health lessons.

What did the researchers do?

Mental Health Leads from SMH-ON recruited teachers across Ontario who were actively teaching Grade 7 or 8 during the time of this study. A pre/post-pilot evaluation of the Guide with one baseline measure and one follow-up measure was conducted during the 2017-2018 academic year using the Teacher Confidence Scale for Mental Health (TCS-MH) and the What Worries Me Scale (WWMS) scales. The TCS-MH scale evaluates teachers’ confidence in teaching mental health-related topics in the classroom, and the WWMS scale evaluates teachers’ worries about teaching mental health-related topics. Researchers used these scales along with other survey measures to assess the LTIC Guide’s acceptability, feasibility, and utility based on responses from 42 educators who completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys.

Main findings

The TCS-MH scale captured an increase in confidence in delivering mental health-related content among teachers who engaged with the LTIC Guide. The WWMS scores also indicated a significant decrease in worries associated with bringing conversations about mental health into the classroom. Although a smaller change was observed in worry scores compared to confidence scores, the fact that significant change was observed in this more complex construct after engaging with the Guide lends some support to the utility of the resource.

In terms of acceptability, many participants indicated that they found the LTIC Guide informative, thorough, and engaging. They also reported feeling more confident after completing the program.

Although the overall findings support the utility and acceptability of the Guide, some concerns regarding feasibility were raised. Among the main concerns raised were: (1) worries about students' level of maturity with regard to broaching more sensitive topics; (2) worries about unpredictability associated with bringing conversations about mental health into the classroom; and (3) lack of time to thoroughly engage with and implement Guide material.

Lessons learned

One of the main lessons learned was how essential multi-level buy-in was for successfully implementing the LTIC Guide. Since the primary barrier to completing this training program was time, teachers needed support from both their school administration and board to participate.

Another lesson learned was that flexibility was crucial for facilitating implementation and uptake. For example, the development of an interactive PDF option and an interactive e-book format now facilitate access to users with limited internet access or those with different learning preferences.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the potential for volunteer bias within the small sample of participants (n=42). Since participants in this sample were invested and in favour of bringing the topic of mental health into the classroom, they may also have demonstrated higher confidence scores and fewer worries at baseline compared to what might be observed among a broader sample of teachers. Another limitation is the drop-off in participation observed throughout the study.

Implications for evidence-based, implementation-sensitive approaches

Overall the evaluation results demonstrate the potential of brief online interventions to improve teacher confidence and comfort with delivering mental health-related content. However, additional research exploring the utility of the LTIC Guide among larger samples of teachers is needed to explore whether outcomes are maintained in the long term.

About this snapshot

Original research article

For a complete description of the research and findings, see the full research article:

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