



2023 Mental Health Month TOOLKIT

Secondary Schools

May is Mental Health Month— an important time to focus on staff and student mental wellbeing.

The week of May 1st-7th is Mental Health Week. This year the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) theme, is *My Story*. Everyone has multiple layers and stories that make us who we are. While each year 1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental illness or a mental health issue, 5 in 5 Canadians— have mental health. May 7th is Child & Youth Mental Health Day, recognizing the important mental health needs of children and youth in our country.

In 2021, School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) partnered with [Wisdom2Action](#) (W2A) to relaunch the [#HearNowON Study](#) to hear from secondary school students across Ontario about their priorities for mental health learning and programming in their schools and communities.

Over two thirds of students indicated that the following topics were the most important for all secondary students to learn about:

- When and how to seek help when mental health needs are more than “a bad day”.
- Ways to cope with common mental health problems.
- Warning signs for suicide.

Based on the finding of this study, five recommendations were identified as next steps to support mental health in schools across Ontario:

- **Recommendation #1:** Students want their teachers, and their parents/caregivers and families, to learn more about mental health.
- **Recommendation #2:** Students want to learn about mental health at school, and prefer that this learning be frequent, early, and varied.
- **Recommendation #3:** Students want greater access to tools and resources to support their mental health, cope with stress and navigate peer support safely.
- **Recommendation #4:** Students want strong equity-based and culturally responsive mental health resources and support.
- **Recommendation #5:** Students want leadership opportunities to be more accessible to every student, and to create space for different leadership styles.

As a result, these topic areas were used to create weekly themes for the month that include activities, resources, social media, and announcements for schools to use.

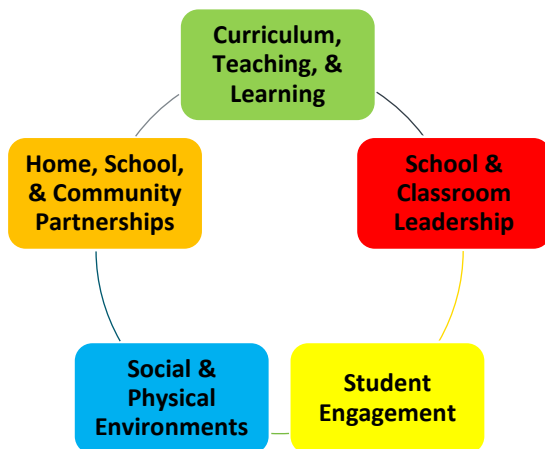
Schools are a key setting to promote the health and well-being of children. Mental health is an important part of our overall health and wellness and includes our emotional and social wellbeing. Our mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. It also determines how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Educating students about mental health is important as it helps them develop skills and knowledge to help them make healthier choices.

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Using the Ministry of Education's [Foundations for a Healthy School framework](#), schools, school boards, parents and community partners can work together to develop healthy school environments that promote and support student well-being.

Figure 1. Foundations of a Healthy School Framework



The [Foundations for a Healthy School resource](#) from the Ontario Ministry of Education promotes and supports student well-being.

It includes the five interconnected areas to develop a comprehensive approach to healthy schools policies, programs, and initiatives related to mental health that will help schools, school boards, parents, and community partners work together.

Visit the [Foundations for a Healthy School](#) web page to understand how the Health Unit applies this framework in area schools.

EVALUATION

We ask educators to provide feedback on this toolkit to assist us in making improvements for future editions. A brief survey can be found at this [link](#) or by scanning the QR code below:





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Who are the Mental Health Month Champions at your School?

- Mental Health Champion Educators or Student counsellors
- Extracurricular groups (e.g., student council, mental health groups within the school, announcement/social media groups)
- Leadership classes/groups

Mental Health Month Themes and Activities

Each week, there will be a theme that supports mental health:

Week 1: Self-Care and Productivity- May 1st-5th

Week 2: Healthy Communication and Relationships- May 8th to 12th

Week 3: Mental Health Education Week- May 15th-19th

Week 4: Mental Health Resources Week- May 22nd-26th

- For each week, schools can include announcements and activities relating to the theme.
- Schools/ School Champions may encourage students to utilize social media platforms in a positive way by completing the includes activities and using hashtags when posting the activities throughout the month (ex: “Mental Health Month 2023” [#MHM23] – see below for more ideas).
- It is important to recognize that your school may need to roll out this campaign using strategies that best meets your needs. For example, the morning announcements and suggesting the activities included below may be a way to introduce and/or continue the conversation of mental health in your school. Many of the announcements can be adapted to use as social media messaging.

Tag the health unit on social media when posting about activities your students are taking part in:

Facebook: @TheWECHU

Twitter: @TheWECHU

Instagram: @thewechu



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Week 1: Self-Care and Productivity from May 1st-5th

In the [#HearNowON study](#) students identified:

- Ways to cope with changes and major stress, how to identify and control emotions, strategies to achieve goals, be organized, and stay on track academically.
- Ways to promote positive mental health and self-care as one of the most important mental health related skills to learn at school.

Topics	Activity	Announcements
Reduce Screen Time Based on the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines , teens 14 to 17 years old should get no more than 2 hours per day of recreational screen time and limited sitting for extended periods.	'#MHM23dnd' – post a picture of you to notify your friends that you'll be off your phone while you're doing an activity (ex: at a sports game, having dinner, etc.). Try and reduce screen time by being off your phone (ex: post a picture of what you're doing before you head to sleep) – and use this activity to motivate you to stay off your phone, during this time! <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For Screen-Free Week/Less Week – can promote the WECHU infographic on sleep and screen time tips.	This week is Screen Free or Screen Less Week. Try putting yourself on DND (Do Not Disturb) during meals and important conversations. Get outside and limit video games.
Sleep Based on the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines , teens 14 to 17 years old need 8 to 10 hours of sleep per night, with consistent bed and wake-up times.	#MHM23GRWMtosleep – post a picture of your sleep hygiene routine (ex: face care routine, reading a book before bed, etc.)	Teens need 8 to 10 hours of sleep per night. Work on creating a routine before bed that includes no screens, relaxing activities, and a comfortable sleeping space.
Healthy Eating Introduce the Canada's Food Guide and basic concepts of food and food skills.	'#MHM23itsserving' – post a picture of you eating with friends/family or of you making your meal.	Expand your skills and taste buds, try a new food or recipe this week. Share the love and enjoy it with a friend or family.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide Food Guide poster or paper resource in student common areas (cafeteria).	
Move Your Body- Hobby Hopping Promoting physical activity to improve mental health and decrease anxiety (ex: spending time outdoors [homework at the park], walking/going for a run with a friend, etc.)	'#MHM23hobbyhop' – post a picture of yourself discovering something new that you enjoy doing (ex: pottery, yoga, a new sport, baking, etc.)	Try something new today. Get out of your comfort zone. Read a new book, try scrapbooking or journalling, get active, or even try to build something.
Self-Care Self-care is about prioritizing your own mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. And it's one of the keys to your overall well-being. It's about nurturing yourself and doing things that help you feel good, connect (or reconnect!) with your inner-self, engage with people or causes important to you, ask for help and more. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kids Help Phone Self-Care List	Organize fun lunch time activities held by extracurricular groups (ex: student council, mental health support groups) to help reduce stress (ex: karaoke, board games, yoga, etc.)	Self-care is about being a champion for your own mental and emotional well-being. Take breaks to do things you enjoy. Try a digital detox. Practice deep breathing. If you're looking for more ways to balance your mind and body, visit Kids Help Phone website and check out their self-care checklist.



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Week 2: Healthy Communication and Relationships- May 8th-12th

In the [#HearNowON study](#) students identified ways to build healthy relationships, manage peer pressure, and deal with conflict, as well as how to identify and control emotions as one of the most important mental health related skills to learn at school.

Encourage students to keep up with Week 1 activities and keep using the hashtags for the whole month.

Topics	Activity	Announcements
Being You Day <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Empowering you to know that your dreams of what is possible are way more valuable than fitting in• Inviting people to embrace their unique capacities and get away from comparison and judgment as the deciding factors for happiness.• Inspiring people to use lightness, joy, and laughter as their guide to who they can choose to be, instead of all they “should” and “should not’s” of our age, race, cultures, and families.	<p>‘#MHM23WhoAmI’ – post a silly-face selfie of you with a caption of who you are/ your identity. This can include: likes/dislikes, hobbies, gender [if you want], culture, etc. (the goal of this post is to capture and do a self-reflection on your authentic ‘you’)</p> <p>School activity – Sticky Note Day: Create theme banners throughout the school (likes, dislikes, hobbies, etc.). Invite students to write small details of who they are (don’t put their names on it) on sticky notes, and then stick them up on the banners around the school. The goal of the activity is to show that everyone is different, and it’s what makes up their school community.</p>	<p>Look around your class today. None of us like all the same things or even fear the same things.</p> <p>We are all different and that makes us special. Be kind, be cool, be you!</p> <p>Remember that “the most important relationship we can all have is the one you have with yourself...”(Aristotle).</p>
Getting to Know You	<p>‘#MHM23newfriend’</p> <p>Set up a booth and encourage students to spend a lunch time with someone they don’t know well. Provide the Getting to Know You questions found in Appendix A</p> <p>Take a selfie at the end of lunch sharing your experience and post it using the hashtag.</p>	<p>Sometimes the hardest part of making a new friend is taking the first step. Step out of your comfort zone today and see how many different people you can talk to.</p> <p>Compliment their outfit, try out a new joke, ask someone how their day went – or even just send a smile their way. You</p>



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		could be the brightest part of someone's day.
Talking About Emotions	<p>Setup a booth near the cafeteria and encourage students to take part in an activity about emotions.</p> <p>The SMHO Emotion Portraits activity is a good one to use. Or have create an outline of a person and use different colour sticky notes to get students to label where they feels/ how their body responds to different emotions like happiness, sadness, stress, etc.,</p>	<p>Take a moment right now and think about how you are feeling. Happy? Sad? Angry? Disgusted? Worried? Surprised? Maybe you are feeling something else.</p> <p>It's important that we check in with ourselves and with others to assess how we are feeling. When we stop and notice our emotions, we can take a step back and make choices about what to do with them.</p>
Building Healthy Relationships	<p>Friends are the people we choose to share our lives with.</p> <p>Close friends can influence and shape who you are as a person. That's why it's important to look at your friendships and decide which ones are strong and supportive, and which ones do more harm than good. Share the Kids Help Phone article titled: Making Friends: How to build friendships.</p>	<p>Are you wondering if you might be in a healthy relationship or an unhealthy relationship?</p> <p>In healthy relationships everyone can feel safe, respected, and accepted for who they are.</p> <p>In unhealthy relationships, a partner may feel anxious, confused, uncertain, guilty, ashamed and even unsafe.</p> <p>All relationships are different, and each relationship has its own challenges. If you're concerned that you or someone you care about may be in an unhealthy relationship reach out to Kids Help Phone.</p>
School Community	<p>Gratitude Graffiti- OPHEA: on mural paper, in a common area of the school, students write or illustrate what they are thankful</p>	<p>What exactly is gratitude? Gratitude is pausing to notice and appreciate things,</p>



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	for within themselves/within their school community.	moments, and people. It's about being thankful. By taking the time to focus on the things we are thankful for, we can help reduce our stress and even start to feel happier. Today, let's all take time to pick out three good things in our day.
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Week 3: Mental Wellness Education- May 15th-19th


The [#HearNowON study](#) found that students believe there are essential topics in mental health that all secondary students should have opportunity to learn about at school (e.g., coping with common mental health concerns, when and how to seek help for more serious mental health problems, suicide prevention). Students want to be involved sooner and learn about mental health, mental illness, and stigma earlier and throughout their education. Students also identified they want to learn about mental health in identity-affirming, culturally responsive manner, building on strengths and differentiating instruction to meet student needs.

	Activities	Announcements
How to Talk to a Friend Peers in school are often the first person a student turns to when struggling with a mental health problem. Students want to be more equipped for to handle these conversations. Tips for talking about mental health (even when it's hard)	Promote the Student Mental Health in Action – Help a friend resource from SMHO. Request a Jack.org talk at your school. Watch the “ Feel out Loud ” by Kids Help Phone. After watching this video have students create their own messaging.	If your friend is just not acting like themselves lately, there is no harm in checking in. What do I say? Just tell them what changes you've noticed and ask if they're ok. Stick to the facts. Don't judge. Don't make assumptions. Just say what you see.
How do I recognize the warning signs that my friend needs help?	Share the How to help a friend: 20+ resources from Kids Help Phone . Request a Jack.org talk at your school.	Sometimes our friends need help. You may notice that there is a shift in the type of messages they send. They could pull away from activities they used to enjoy. Maybe the way they normally care for themselves has changed.



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		Try reaching out and seeing if they want to talk. Encourage them to talk to others, whether that is another friend or a safe adult. Send them information on Kids Help Phone.
Anxiety	<p>Promote the messaging and student resources from School Mental Health Ontario around anxiety management and mental health literacy.</p> <p>They can be used as social media or as resources and activities to promote at a both.</p>	<p>It's normal to feel anxious, nervous, or worried at times. Maybe you've felt anxious when you had a big test or presentation. Most people have felt like this.</p> <p>Some people feel anxiety that is too intense, worries or fears take up too much of their time and energy and they might begin to avoid things that make them anxious. If you feel like anxiety is too much, talk to a safe adult, such as a parent, health care provider, or teacher.</p>
Depression	<p>Promote the mood app by mindyourmind, that allows you to track and make note of your mood over time and provides wellness tips.</p> 	<p>Although it's common to feel sad or upset from time to time, depression is deeper and longer lasting. It can affect how you think, feel and act.</p> <p>If you're experiencing depression, it doesn't mean you're lazy or weak. It's as real and as serious as a physical health condition. Taking care of your mental and emotional health is just as important as taking care of your physical body.</p>
Self-Esteem and Body Image	Kids Help Phone has Tips on how to boost your-self-esteem.	If you had to describe yourself...what would you say? Stop and think about it. Did you think about something positive? Or was it



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Find information on the Kids Help Phone website about ways to practice self-acceptance and boost your self-esteem .	Access BANA resources – podcasts, information library, clinical services Contact a BANA Speaker for presentations on eating disorders, proper nutrition, self care.	something negative? We can sometimes be our own worst critic. Now think about a friend...what would you say about them? Often, we see positive in others, we don't always see in ourselves. Next time you're getting hung up on negative self-talk, try talking to yourself the way you would talk to a friend.
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Week 4: Mental Health Resources Week- May 22th-26th

The [#HearNowON study](#) found that students are not currently aware of the supports and services available at school and would like better access to resources and tools to help with managing major stress and transitions, emotional self-care, and helping a friend with a mental health problem. Students would appreciate a “one stop” information source about mental health that is responsive and relevant. During this week we will make students aware of local programs and supports.

Topics	Activity	Announcements
Mental Health and Addiction Nurses (MHAN) MHANs provide early intervention, support and strategies that address specific mental health and addiction needs for students.	Have your MHAN create a booth during lunch time to promote resources and services in the community.	Did you know your school has a Mental Health and Addictions Nurse? These nurses provide support for students who have mental health and substance use needs.
Youth Wellness Hub Offers services for youth ages 12 to 25 without a wait list or referral. They have three locations in Windsor, Leamington, and Amherstburg. Programs are offered in the areas of mental health, substance use, peer support, food skills, homework help and more.	Promote resources for the Youth Wellness Hub in your school.	Have you heard of the Youth Wellness Hub? It offers services for youth ages 12 to 25 without a wait list or referral. They have three locations in Windsor, Leamington, and Amherstburg. Programs are offered in the areas of mental health, substance use, peer support, food skills, homework help and more.



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<p><u>SPACCY</u></p> <p>The Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth (SAPACCY) promotes improved mental wellness for young people who identify as African, Caribbean and/or Black. The service is for black youth ages 12-29 (and their family/caregivers) that are experiencing mental health and/or substance use challenges.</p>	<p>Promote resources for the SPACCY in your school.</p>	<p>The Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth (SAPACCY) promotes improved mental wellness for young people who identify as African, Caribbean and/or Black. The service is for black youth ages 12-29 (and family/caregivers) that are experiencing mental health and/or substance use challenges.</p>
<p><u>Kids Help Phone</u></p> <p>Kids Help Phone is Canada's a 24/7 e-mental health service offering free, confidential support to teens and youth in both English and French. They provide mental health tips and information as well as crisis support and professional counselling.</p>	<p>Promote resources for the Kids Help Phone in your school.</p>	<p>Kids Help Phone is Canada's a 24/7 e-mental health service offering free, confidential support to teens and youth in both English and French. They provide mental health tips and information as well as crisis support and professional counselling.</p>
<p><u>Jack.org- Provides a Be There Certificate:</u></p> <p>The certificate is free, students can complete it at their own pace in less than 2 hours. It includes 6 interactive lessons designed to increase mental health literacy and provide you with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to safely support anyone who may be struggling with their mental health.</p>	<p>Promote Jack.org resources in your school and encourage students to complete the Be There certificate.</p>	<p>Want to increase your mental health literacy?</p> <p>Jack.org- Provides a Be There Certificate: that is free, and can complete at your own pace in less than 2 hours. It includes 6 interactive lessons designed to increase mental health literacy and provide you with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to safely support anyone who may be struggling with their mental health.</p>

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CURRICULUM, TEACHING, AND LEARNING

The resources in this section are to support educators in understanding the issues related to mental health. The resources are guidelines and suggestions that allow educators to choose which ones work best for them.

For Educators

Resources

- **Common student mental health concerns (SMHO)**: Early identification and prevention services can make a critical difference for a student who is having difficulty with their thoughts, behaviour, or emotions. Educators have a role in helping to identify students in need of more support and reinforcing helpful skills and strategies in the classroom.
- To find more resources about mental health, visit our [Mental Health Resources for Educators](#) web page.

Lessons and Activities

- Find lessons and activities on the [School Mental Health Ontario website](#), such as the [Mental Health Literacy: Student Mental Health in Action](#)-which includes lesson plans and resources
- Use the [Mental Health Month Wellness Challenge Calendars](#) with your students.

SCHOOL & CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP

Improving school and classroom leadership involves all members of the school community to work together to create a positive classroom and school environment. Continue the conversation about mental health by registering for the [OPHEA Healthy Schools Certification- French Version](#) (check website for registration deadline).

Students want the adults in their lives to be well informed about mental health to better support them at school, at home, and in their communities. Students believe that when adults in their lives have greater knowledge about mental health, it will reduce the stigma and when reaching out for help and result in more supportive responses. Including mental health in

- **MH LIT- Mental Health in Action**: The *MH LIT – Mental Health in Action* course from School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO) is designed to provide educators with basic knowledge and information related to mental health, strategies to enhance student mental health, and everyday practices for use in the classroom. LEARN about mental health. INSPIRE through your actions. TEACH in ways that encourage belonging and that support student mental health.

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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

When students feel empowered and value their learning, they become engaged and have better learning outcomes. Below are resources that support improving student mental health:

- [RNAO's- Youth Mental Health and Addictions Champions Initiative Toolkit](#): Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) partnered with public health units, School Boards, SMH ASSIST and provincial youth-based organizations to develop a peer-based youth mental health initiative. The partnership resulted in the development of the toolkit to support the dissemination and implementation of evidence-based, youth-led mental health promotion and substance misuse prevention initiatives in school settings. This toolkit includes guiding frameworks, how to build your team, youth training content, event planning, and evaluation tips.
- [Ophea- Ideas for Action: Mental Health](#): Can be used as a starting point to encourage students, to start conversations about topics related to mental health in your school and community. This guide provides key information about existing programs and resources, tips for getting started, things to consider, sources of support in your community, in Ontario, and across Canada, and activity ideas in the following areas:
 - [School Wide](#)
 - [Connected to Classroom](#)
 - [Connected to Self](#)
- [Jack.org](#): Start a chapter at your high school. Jack.org is a Canadian charity that partners with youth leaders to improve youth mental health outcomes in their communities. They aim to enhance young people's ability to recognize struggle in both themselves and their peers, seek out appropriate mental health support and resources, and advocate for systems that are better able to meet the diverse and complex needs of young people.
- [Jack.org- Be There Certificate](#): The certificate is free, complete it at your own pace in less than 2 hours. It includes 6 interactive lessons designed to increase mental health literacy and provide you with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to safely support anyone who may be struggling with their mental health.

School Campaigns and Messaging

- Start a Student Wellness Committee. Reach out to your school nurse to help support this initiative.
- Advocate for Mindful Minutes- encourage teachers to give 2 min each day to allow students to take time to reflect on their feelings and allow students to relax in a way that is helpful to them.
- Use messages from [Self-Care 101 for students](#) to keep morning announcements positive.

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SOCIAL & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Social and physical environments are important for student learning. Social and physical environments that feel safe, caring, and healthy, contribute to better learning. It also supports social, emotional, and physical development.

- Post mental wellness statements throughout the school/classroom to remind students of the healthy coping strategies available to deal with their emotions.
- Create bulletin boards to display messaging relating to positive mental health throughout the school.

School Board Policies

School boards can set policy that influence the social and environmental norms that student's experience. Please review your specific school board and/or school's policies that promote mental health for further information. Individual schools should speak to their school boards about whether they can develop individual school policies.

HOME, SCHOOL, & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Home, school, and community partnership involves connecting parents, school staff, family programs, and the community to support and promote opportunities for well-being. To get students more in touch with their mental health, [SMHO provides activities](#) that families can do at home with their child.

If you are looking for more support for children and youth, you can visit the [health unit website](#), or:

- [Windsor-Essex Youth Services Card](#)
- Call 2-1-1 or visit 211ontario.ca to find mental health resources near you.
- [WEConnectKids](#): a partnership between the five core service providers for child and youth mental health and addiction services in Windsor/Essex. It is a free, confidential mental health service for children, youth, and families who live in Windsor-Essex. Contact 519-257-KIDS (5437).
- The [Youth Wellness Hub Windsor-Essex](#) offers walk in services to youth ages 12 to 25 without a wait list or referral.
- [Kids Help Phone](#) is available 24/7 at 1-800-668-6868. Their team of trained counsellors provide a free texting service and live online or live telephone chat for kids, teens, and young adults in both English and French.
- If a child is in a crisis, follow your school board policies. Visit the [Ontario webpage](#) to find more services.



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APPENDIX A: GETTING TO KNOW YOU ACTIVITY

Here is a list of questions that can be used of the Getting to Know You activity. Students can pair up and take turns asking each other questions. If completing it in a classroom setting, after the question session is completed, each pairing can present something new they learned about their partner. Students can also create their own questions.

1. What is your favorite subject in school?
2. What is your favorite dessert or flavor of ice cream?
3. What is/was your favorite pet? (If you've never had a pet, what pet would you choose if you could?)
4. What's your favorite thing to do during summer vacation?
5. What is your favorite TV show or movie?
6. Do you like to get up early or sleep in on the weekends?
7. What country would you most like to visit and why?
8. If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
9. What is your favorite thing to do after school?
10. Describe your best friend (without saying their name).
11. If your house was on fire and you had time to safely grab one thing before running out, what would it be?
12. If you could be famous for something, what would it be?
13. Describe one quality you wish you had.
14. Name one thing that would make your parents/family proud of you?
15. What is the best gift or present you have ever received and why was it so special?
16. Do you think it would be easier to be an only child or have lots of siblings?
17. How would you describe a true friend?
18. What is the hardest part of high school?
19. When you think about the future, what worries you the most?
20. If you could give your parents one tip on how to be better parents, what would it be?
21. If you had to choose right now what job you would have as an adult, what would it be?
22. If you could travel to the past in a time machine and change one thing, what would it be?
23. What is your biggest fear?
24. Name one thing you and I appear to have in common.
25. If we became friends, what is one thing we might enjoy doing together?