



Alberta **Regional** Consortia

Design Thinking Toolkit: Building Life Promoting Cultures in Schools

For Use by School Authorities and Their Partners

Components of Life Promoting Cultures

Schools can play an integral role in supporting a sense of hope for the future. Students spend more time in school than any other environment, thereby offering an important opportunity for connectedness in each of their lives. A life promoting culture has multiple components. Each piece, whether staff, parents, community, learning spaces, curriculum or the students themselves, is strengthened by the connection between all the components.

When creating a life promoting culture, school authorities may see greater success when intentionally increasing the opportunity for two or more components to work in conjunction. Keeping this image at the forefront of the planning process may illustrate opportunities for connection that otherwise are not obvious.

Guiding Principles

The Design Thinking Toolkit: Building Life Promoting Cultures in Schools uses a comprehensive, connected and evidence-informed approach.

Please keep in mind that it:

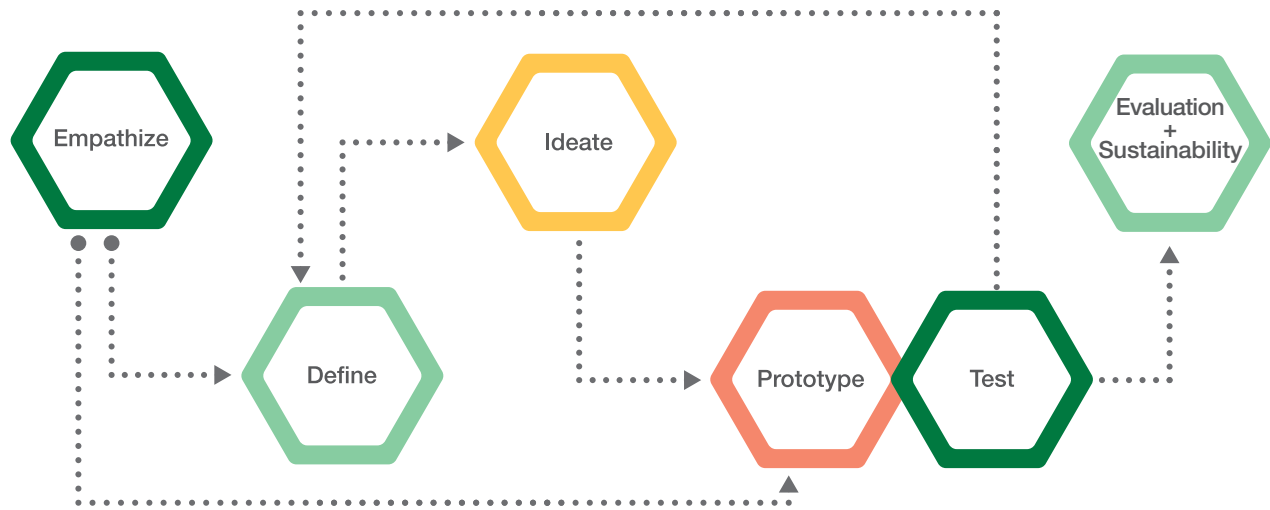
- Exists as a continuum and is by nature holistic.
- Is a shared responsibility.
- Bolsters resilience by minimizing risk factors and building protective factors.
- Respects cultures, communities and traditions.



Design Thinking Approach

This resource uses a design thinking approach. Our toolkit will support you through the five stages – Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test. Design thinking places emphasis on a human-centric approach. Thinking outside the box throughout the process is encouraged.

Our resource adds an additional stage to the traditional approach in order to address evaluation and sustainability.



Before You Begin

Consider the **Design Thinking Toolkit: Building Life Promoting Cultures in Schools** as an invitation to include multiple stakeholders into the ongoing life promotion and suicide prevention conversation.

Who is responsible for crisis planning and mental health supports at the jurisdictional level that you should invite into the conversation? How can other stakeholders like students, parents, trustees, and partnering organizations can be a part of your planning?

As a team, reflect on:

- The voice of all stakeholders.
- Alignment to current work and initiatives in the district.
- Shared understandings and language throughout the jurisdiction.

Include all components of a life promoting culture in your thinking. This information will help you work through the first two stages of the process.



Before You Begin: Voice

Evident in a robust school system's life promotion plan are the varied and diverse voices of the school community. This includes consideration of all stakeholders, including students, parents, educational staff, trustees, community partners/agencies, local Indigenous communities, and representation for diverse communities including LGBTQ2S+ communities. As well, the voice of evidence and knowledge informed approaches are apparent in well-developed plans; comprehensive plans consider current evidence and knowledge in the context of the system culture and the profiles of all schools and communities within the system.

Use this worksheet to fill in responses to the guiding questions and prompts. Keep in mind all the aspects of life promoting cultures.



Who are the relevant stakeholders?	How do we know?
What needs and strengths do each of these stakeholder groups have?	What evidence and data supports our understanding of stakeholder needs and strengths?

Before You Begin: Alignment

A comprehensive approach to life promotion aligns with and supports many of the efforts and activities schools undertake to promote student safety and well-being. Consideration of other system initiatives such as three-year planning cycles, mental health planning across the continuum of supports and crisis response plans result in a life promotion plan that is manageable and meaningful within the context of your current system efforts.

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What system initiatives/supports do we currently have in place to support student wellness?	How do our current initiatives fit within the context of a life promoting culture?
Have schools/communities initiated additional programs and supports?	Is there clear articulated alignment between current initiatives?

Before You Begin: Shared Understanding

Clarity of the words used to talk about life promotion, risk of suicide and suicide within the school system are important. A common language builds shared understanding, enhances clear and accurate communication, and reduces stigma. A well-developed plan includes approaches to communicate and grow shared understandings and is responsive to the changing understandings of best practice that emerge in research over time. Life promotion and suicide prevention require a collaborative approach that builds partnerships with local and regional agencies and service providers and promotes a shared understanding across partners as well.



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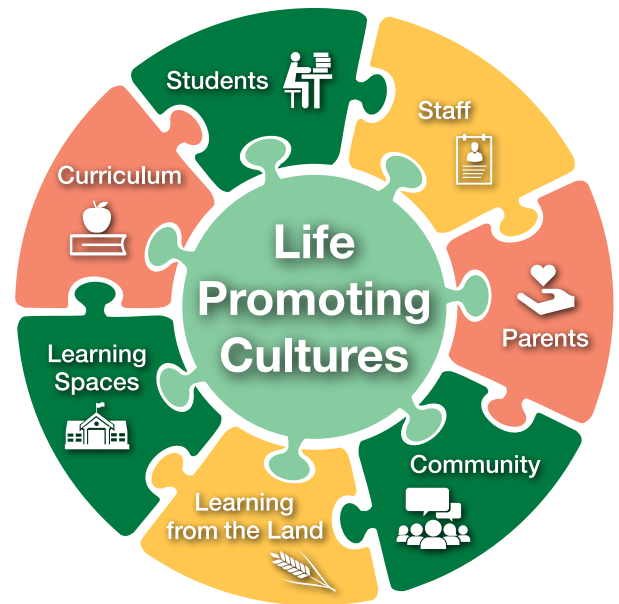
What are the understandings about student mental health that guide your system supports?	What data sources are you relying on to inform your practice and policies?
To what extent are these understandings shared across your system?	What does this data say about the depth of shared understanding within your system and community?
What are the intentional efforts, procedures in place to ensure shared and current understanding over time?	

Stage 1: Empathize

Guiding Question: To what extent does our school authority create and develop the conditions for life promoting cultures? How do we know? What channels are used to share this information? Who can we direct questions to?

Empathy is the centerpiece of a human-centered design process. During the Empathize stage, the main focus of the planning team is to understand active participants in the school system within the context of life promoting cultures:

- Understand the way students and staff do things and why.
- Appreciate physical and emotional needs.
- Identify how students think about their schools and school authority.
- Ascertain what is meaningful to students.



Use the following worksheet to fill in responses to the guiding question and prompts. Keep in mind all the aspects of life promoting cultures.

Stage 1: Empathize

Review your thoughts from the previous section where you reflected on the voice of all stakeholders, alignment to current work and initiatives in the district, shared understandings and language throughout the jurisdiction. What do you notice? What do you need to follow up on and ask questions about?

Consider the data and evidence as a system and how it shows the way students are supported in schools. What is the data telling the planning team about what staff and students think, believe and value?

Stage 1: Empathize (Cont.)

Observe and engage student behaviour in the context of school culture and surroundings. Engage in conversations (as opposed to interviews) with the students relating to life promoting cultures and their current experiences. One strategy is to have students select an artifact that symbolizes life promoting cultures, then ask them to explain their selection to you. Many stories are embodied in artifacts.

Unpack all of the information you have gathered in the previous steps to try and build a big picture understanding of your current context and challenges. The goal is to make connections and begin to synthesize ideas which lead into the next stage.

Stage 2: Define

Guiding Question: How might we _____?

The Define stage is all about bringing clarity and focus to the team's planning efforts. In this phase, the planning team should define their challenge(s) based on what was learned in the Empathy stage. The Define stage is about making sense of the gathered information.

In the Define phase, you craft a meaningful and actionable problem statement, redefining and focusing on insights gathered, and asking questions:

1. Consider what stood out when talking and observing your data.
2. What patterns emerge when you look at the set? If you noticed something interesting ask yourself (and your team) why that might be.
3. Develop an understanding of the students and staff involved.
4. Synthesize and select a limited set of needs that you think are important to fulfill. Feel free to focus on key needs.
5. Work to express insights you may have developed through empathy and research work.
6. Articulate a point-of-view by combining the elements of student, need and insight as an actionable problem statement that will drive the rest of your design work.

In the Define stage, your team will undertake two specific actions to move from empathy to action:

- Create POV (point of view) statements to highlight the most critical needs.
- Create HMW (how might we) questions that will drive towards actions in the Ideate stage. HMW questions are short questions designed to stimulate brainstorming.

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Stage 2: Define

Express the Issue:

USER + NEED + INSIGHT

User . . . (descriptive) needs [need . . . (verb)] because [insight. . . (compelling)]

Example: A grade nine student who has just moved to our community from a large city needs help feeling more socially accepted because they are part of a religion not represented in the class and they recently had a parent pass away suddenly.

As your team creates the statements, keep in mind what patterns and themes emerged as areas of need in the empathy work. In order to create, enhance or sustain a life promoting culture within your school authority, what do groups or individuals need and why?

Craft three to four POV statements with your team, demonstrating insights about the data gathered and discussed in the Empathy stage.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Stage 2: Define (Cont.)

Reframe your statements into HMW questions. Some tips include:

- Rephrase and reframe your POV statements as questions by adding “how might we” at the beginning.
- Break down your POV statements into ideas if you need to. Five or many more smaller actionable and meaningful questions may come out of a single POV statement.
- Look at your HMW questions. Do they allow for a variety of solutions? Consider broadening them. Your HMW questions should generate a number of possible answers and will become a launch pad for your Ideation stage, such as brainstorm.
- Are your HMW questions too broad? Narrow them down. Aim for a narrow enough focus to offer a starting point for your brainstorm. At the same time you should also aim for enough breadth to give you room to explore unconventional ideas.

Interaction Design Foundation

1.

2.

3.

4.

Stage 3: Ideate

Guiding Question: Is this solution obvious or innovative? Has anything been overlooked, related to the components of life promoting culture?

Ideate is the stage of the design process focusing on idea generation. Extrapolate concepts and outcomes from work done in previous stages. Ideation provides both the fuel and source material for building prototypes and producing innovative solutions for life promoting cultures.

The Ideate stage creates the transition from identifying problems to creating solutions.

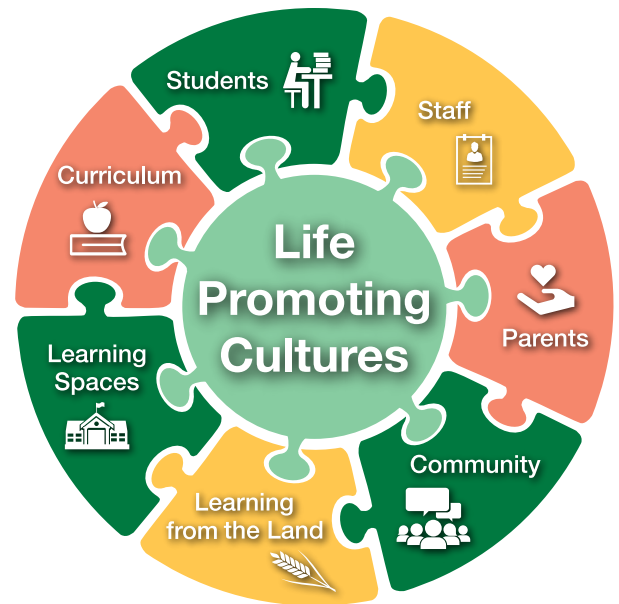
Ideation is your chance to combine your understanding of the problem with your team's ability to generate solutions.

The Ideation stage is about pushing for the widest possible range of ideas you can choose from. The goal is not to simply find one-size-fits-all solution. The determination of an ideal solution will be discovered at a later stage through testing and feedback.

Various forms of ideation are leveraged to:

- Step beyond obvious solutions to a true brainstorming session where ideas are generated without constraint.
- Harness a team's collective perspectives and strengths.
- Uncover unexpected areas of exploration.
- Create fluency, volume, flexibility and variety in for innovation options.
- Bypass obvious solutions and drive teams to results maybe not uncovered otherwise.

Ideate by combining your conscious mind, unconscious mind and rational thoughts with imagination.



Substitute:

Replace a thing or concepts with something else.

Combine:

Unite! What? Who? Ideas? Materials?

Adapt:

Adjust to a new purpose. Reshape? Tune-up?

Modify, Magnify, Minify:

Change the colour, sound, motion, form or size. Make it larger, stronger, thicker, higher or longer. Make it smaller, lighter, slower, less frequent or reduce.

Put It to Another Use:

Change when, where, location times or how to use it.

Eliminate:

Omit, get rid of, cut out, simplify or weed out.

Rearrange, Reverse:

Change the order, sequence, pattern, layout, plan, scheme, regroup and/or redistribute.

Bob Eberle (1971) SCAMPER: Games for Imagination Development

For example, in a brainstorm you leverage the group by building on each other's ideas and surrounding yourself with inspiring materials related to the subject matter. Embracing misunderstanding can allow you to reach further than you could by simply thinking about a problem in a silo.

How to Ideate:

Consider using different techniques in the Ideate stage:

- Bodystorming
- Mindmapping
- Sketching
- Ideas and methods you have worked with or have learned about.

Another excellent tool for this stage is the Opposite Thinking method from Board of Innovation you can access here <https://www.boardofinnovation.com/tools/opposite-thinking/>.

Use the following worksheet to fill in responses to the guiding question and prompts. Keep in mind all the aspects of life promoting cultures.

Stage 3: Ideate

List two assumptions you have about the problem you are trying to solve or about solutions that you have in mind .

Pick an assumption and define an opposite reality.

Individually think about these new realities, how it affects your problem and add potential solutions.

Continue all steps you have identified opposite realities and potential solutions for all assumptions. Tip: Don't hesitate to build upon the opposite realities or proposed solutions of your team members!

Stage 4&5: Prototype & Test

Guiding Question: In what ways and to what capacity can a prototype start a conversation? What variables are we able to change within our prototype? What insights have we gained through this stage and how will they inform our future work?

Prototyping is used in Design Thinking to create a scaled-down solution, bring a potential solution to life and investigate how people might perceive that idea. Prototypes may need to be redesigned depending on feedback.

As prototypes are created, solicit feedback from your students, staff, and stakeholders - this is the testing stage. This allows for another opportunity to gain greater empathy and understanding of the people you are designing for. Continue to focus on the “why” and what you can learn about people (both staff and students), the problem, and your potential solutions. Though prototyping and testing are sometimes entirely intertwined, it is often the case that planning and executing a successful testing scenario is a considerable additional step after creating a prototype.

- A prototype can be anything that someone can interact with:
- A wall of post-it notes
- Role-playing activities
- A storyboard
- Something your students and staff can experience

How to Prototype: Get started with a prototype by building and creating. Sometimes you may not be sure of where you are going, but the act of making something and generating ideas will get you started on the path to a solution.

Don't spend too long on one prototype. We may create ideas and then believe they are the one solution. When creating prototypes, create and then move on to the next idea. Focus on generating possibilities instead of getting too attached to one single idea.

Identify a variable. What are you testing with each prototype? Try to answer a single question with each version. That being said, don't shut out any breakthroughs you have because they answer a different question.

Build with students and/or staff in mind. What do you hope to test with the students or staff? What sorts of behavior do you expect? Answering these questions will help focus your prototyping and help you receive meaningful feedback in the testing stage.

How to Test: The primary objective is always the health, well-being and safety of students. The Test stage does not advocate for trying prototypes in any way that may precipitate a negative outcome. Prototypes are not for trying out on a student experiencing crisis, and should be based on what we already know about best practices for life promotion and suicide prevention. Testing a prototype may instead involve workshopping a solution with fellow educators or stakeholders, or a supporting a class discussion at an appropriate time.

Ask users to compare. Bringing multiple prototypes to the field test gives stakeholders a basis for comparison and can reveal latent needs.

Use the following worksheet to fill in responses to the guiding question and prompts. Keep in mind all the aspects of life promoting cultures.



Stage 4 & 5: Prototype & Test

In what ways and to what capacity can a prototype start a conversation? What variables are we able to change within our prototype? What insights have we gained through this stage and how will they inform our future work?

Use bullet points to list some of your prototype ideas. Focus on generating possibilities instead of getting too attached to one single idea.

What are some ways you might test prototypes? Keep in mind the suggestions from the previous page and ensure you are testing your prototype in a way that will not impact anyone in crisis.

Epilogue: Evaluation and Sustainability Planning Stage

Guiding Questions: What will we accept as evidence of impact? How will we sustain this work over time?

While not part of the traditional design thinking cycle, an Evaluation and Sustainability stage is essential for effective implementation of life promotion and suicide prevention efforts in the context of school authorities.

Once a prototype has been tested, refined and implemented at a jurisdictional level, continual review of the plan with consideration to ongoing education, the context of the school authority, and the results of pertinent data within your area is recommended.

Asking all stakeholders to look for evidence of a life-promoting, connected culture, sustainability, and ongoing reflection may be helpful. Highlighting any areas needing improvement or newly developed concerns within the school authority's life promoting culture, would restart the Design Thinking process from the beginning.

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Epilogue: Connected Culture

In school authorities where a life-promoting connected culture thrives, there is evidence of intentional actions to promote student academic, social and emotional safety, well-being, and belonging. Student mental health is a focus for all educators. Partnerships with community agencies serve to support students in seeing relevance and rigor in their school experience and to grow social and emotional learning. Instructional leaders have access to tools that can be utilized in working with staff, students and families to reduce the stigma associated with suicide.

Current Context:

Evidence:

Clear and Sustainable

Clear roles, responsibilities, and processes identified within school authorities and between school authorities and their community partners are imperative for effective life promoting cultures. School authorities and their respective partners require understanding of and respect for one another's individual and shared mandates and a working understanding of mutual goals and priorities.

Effective development of life promoting cultures also requires evidence of a shared positive language rooted in a strength based approach that permeates all student and staff interactions, building protective factors for all learners. Staff should have clarity about the continuum of supports for suicide prevention in the school authority, and how to navigate the escalation of students to greater levels of support as required. Systematic ongoing professional learning, including a thoughtful approach for new staff, is evident.

Current Context:

Evidence:

Ongoing Reflection

Reviewing your vision for life promotion, ongoing design thinking processes regularly with an eye to current evidence and knowledge, the evolving landscape of the school authority context, and the results of your selected data measures is an important part of the successful development of life promoting cultures.

Current Context:

Evidence:

Foundational Understanding Resources

- Building Strength, Inspiring Hope: A Provincial Action Plan for Youth Suicide Prevention
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/96258654-ed5c-4bb5-809b-717ddcf11dc4/resource/3c368257-c873-41fc-8f89-3f9853d49ec1/download/alberta-youth-suicide-prevention-plan.pdf>
- Alberta Education's Pathways to Hope
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/71ab7d6a-d469-4958-9512-e4e50ca8e2a7/resource/07e6ec0a-76ce-4976-850a-0da770a9a107/download/edc-pathways-to-hope-best-practices-in-suicide-prevention-2020.pdf>
- The Centre for Suicide Prevention
<https://www.suicideinfo.ca>
- Working Together to Support Mental Health in Alberta Schools
https://education.alberta.ca/media/3576206/working_together_to_support_mental_health.pdf
- Supporting High School Completion: A Toolkit For Success
<https://arpcresources.ca/consortia/supporting-high-school-completion-tool-kit-success>
- Working Together to Prevent Suicide in Canada: The Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention
<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/public-health/migration/publications/healthy-living-vie-saine/framework-suicide-cadre-suicide/alt/framework-suicide-cadre-suicide-eng.pdf>
- Manitoba's Best Practices in School-based Suicide Prevention: A Comprehensive Approach
https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/ysp/ysp_bestpractices.pdf
- CASP (Canadian Association for the Prevention of Suicide)
<https://suicideprevention.ca>
- AHS Mental Health Online Resources for Educators
<https://more.hmhc.ca>
- NSSI Protocol and Modules (Targeted/Individual Support Level)
<https://more.hmhc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/1-Page-NSSI.pdf>
- SI Protocol and Modules (Targeted/Individual Support Level)
<https://more.hmhc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/1-Page-SI.pdf>

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- Interaction Design Foundation
<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/define-and-frame-your-design-challenge-by-creating-your-point-of-view-and-ask-how-might-we>
- Manitoba's Best Practices in School-based Suicide Prevention: A Comprehensive Approach
https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/ysp/ysp_bestpractices.pdf

Funded by the Government of Alberta &
Developed With Support and Feedback From:



Alberta **Regional** Consortia

Calgary Catholic School District

Golden Hills School Division

Tsuut'ina Education Department

Westmount Charter School