

Mental Health and Learning

Mental health is critical to a child's ability to learn and concentrate. Emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and neglect can lead to problems like attention disorders (ADHD), disruptive behaviors, difficulty storing and processing information, pervasive or confused thinking and trouble relaying thoughts and ideas. If problems are identified early, they can be treated before they impact academic performance or lead to disciplinary problems. Positive outcomes of mental health services include increased academic performance, improved attendance, increased engagement in academic or other school activities, and fewer class disruptions. Students are given the skills to make successful contributions to the school environment, and the community and to become productive adult citizens. Mental health services contribute tremendously to a child's confidence and self esteem which can enhance student achievement.



teachers or other staff may notice signs of depression, defiance, slipping grades, fights with other students or absences. Mental health services can help alleviate some of these issues and allow a student to focus on school activities. Schools can also offer structured healthy environments, where students witness positive adult and student interactions and healthy social settings.

Schools are an ideal place to offer mental health services because students may feel less stigmatized getting in-school services than they might at a mental health clinic. Also, services are available when and where students need them. There are no long waits for an appointment. Preventive interventions can also be performed regularly in schools by a team of licensed clinical social workers, psychologists, case management coordinators, teachers and other staff who provide comprehensive, well-rounded student care.

Did you know?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) indicated that, by the year 2020, childhood mental health disorders will rise by over **50%** internationally.
- The surgeon general's report on mental health (2001) indicates that children in most need of mental health services are less likely to receive care. At greatest risk are children living in poverty, minorities or those living in foster care.
- According to the 2003 Center for Health and Health Services published report "Caring for Kids," about **15 million** kids in the US have emotional or behavioral health disorders.
- In a March 2009 report, the National Academies estimate that the financial costs of mental health treatment services for young people are estimated at **\$247 billion** annually.

Why Schools?

School based mental health services are intended to improve student behavior and achievement. They reduce barriers that prevent students from learning. Schools can be the first line of defense for students experiencing mental health challenges, because their

For further information

- A Guide to School Mental Health Services – Colorado Department of Education (CDE) – <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/Guide2MntlHlthSvcs.pdf>
- 2001 Surgeon General Report on Mental Health – <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/pdfs/front.pdf>
- Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders among Young People – The National Academies 2009 – http://www.bocyf.org/prevention_researchers_brief.pdf

Comprehensive Mental Health Services

Your school can offer a wide variety of services designed to meet the multiple and changing needs of children and their families. A comprehensive, interconnected school-wide program will make mental health services an integral part of your school's culture. A fully integrated program contains each of the following categories.



Individual Counseling

School provides one-on-one sessions with a mental health therapist, offering students individual treatment and intensive intervention sessions. The process may include an assessment for social/emotional development and learning needs of a student. Special mental health needs are supported. A team approach is used to complement individual treatment including participation of staff, teachers, social worker or nurse, family members and students.

Group Therapy

School provides for a variety of sessions on issues that students share. Students participate in a group setting. Sessions may include topics on anger management, self-esteem, grief and loss, depression and anxiety, pregnancy, social and communication skills, stress and mood management, ADHD symptoms, sexual abuse, self-empowerment, and substance abuse.

Teacher Training

Counselors work with teachers to teach, re-train, and offer suggestions on how to handle situations in the classroom. Teachers receive training in identifying the warning signs for mental health issues and instruction on how to handle specific problems such as ADD, depression and behavioral disorders. Training may be

given on the steps to take in an escalated situation. Techniques for rewarding students for good behavior are also offered.

School Wide Initiatives

School-wide initiatives that support a set of behavioral norms students should follow are posted around the school. The school has a classroom-based curriculum to prevent offenses such as substance abuse, aggressive behavior and unsafe sex. Classroom education is offered to students on how their mind works and its connection to learning and social skills. The school provides classroom meetings which help students with problem solving and coping skills, such as how to deal with bullying behavior.

Community Resources

Assistance is offered in the community that enhances and expands services already offered by school mental health professionals. School provides information about community resources on bulletin boards, at school meetings and events, in newsletters and on school websites. Community works in partnership with school mental health services.

Family Counseling and Intervention

Families are included in their child's school team meetings and in all aspects of their child's treatment. Consultations and trainings are provided so that parents understand their child's needs and have information on child development and parenting skills. Families are provided with skills to support the implementation of a child's individual education program or family support plan.

Crisis Intervention Protocol

The school has a fully comprehensive crisis prevention plan and mental health response protocol for functional, chronic, and critical mental health response situations. School staff is trained on the process and is included in student treatment and discussions.

Jump start your mental health services

Start small and grow from there with some simple activities like offering an outlet for students to talk about their feelings, providing a self esteem or self empowerment group class, training teachers on 1 minute stress relief activities or adapting a no tolerance policy for verbal abuse.

Long term success

Each of these categories can involve a multitude of strategies to help ensure long term success. To identify the ones that most appropriately meet the needs of your school, please contact Cathy Schmelter at Get Smart Schools – cathy@getsmartschools.org.