School Practitioner Community of Practice
(A network for sharing & exchange)
February 13, 2019

Topic for discussion

>**Organizing a high school mental health group**

Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

Note: *Go to* http://smhp.psych.ucla **for links to other Center resources including**
>Upcoming initiatives, conferences & workshops
>Calls for grant proposals, presentations, and papers
>Training and job opportunities
>Upcoming webcasts & other professional development opportunities

This resource is from the
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA

Given shrinking education budgets, we have been asked to increase our outreach to make our free resources more available (e.g., for planning, professional development, etc.).

So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).

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For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to **Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm

Topic for Discussion –

Request: "I am a High School sophomore. I have reached out to you since I am founding a student organization at my school called, 'Better Minds' in hopes to bring more awareness to mental health issues in my community and provide my peers, their friends, and families with resources on how to deal and process these types of situations. I wondered if you would be able to provide me with resources and information on how to prevent tragedies, how to deal with the numerous mental illnesses, understanding how they work, and maybe even ideas/ways/events that the organization can partake in. I would really appreciate it, as I am very passionate about this club and want to make a change in my community now."

Center response: Great to hear you are working to enhance students' understanding of good mental health. Hope you have identified a faculty/staff member to guide you. This is a great opportunity to invite the student support staff at your school (and from the district office) to meet with the students and share the work they do related to mental health and how/when students in need can contact them.

As you look for brief resources for the group to discuss and share, here are a few of the many on our website that may be helpful:

>*Addressing Stigma as part of student support* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/stigma.pdf

>*About resilience and schools* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resili.pdf

>*Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH*
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf

>*About Supporting Those Who Seem Depressed* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/dep.pdf

>*Students and Anxiety Problems* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/anxiety.pdf

And here are some recommendations from two colleagues in the field:

(1) My first recommendation is to begin exploring the *SAMSHA* website at:
    http://www.samhsa.gov/children or perhaps the Centers for Disease Control at:
    http://www.kidsmentalhealth.org. I trust the information they offer. The *SAMSHA* site included an awareness event as well.
        My second suggestion is to find some local experts, perhaps a practicing psychologist or physician, who could come and speak to the student group, offer ideas and suggestions and explain the local needs as well as existing services in the community. This is especially important when creating awareness. Should someone be concerned about another student, their own child or a friend, what can they do? Who could they call or talk to? Where could they go? A local expert could help tie folks into existing services.
        Some of the issues mentioned such as "how to prevent tragedies" or "how to deal with numerous mental illnesses" are such loaded phrases. Again, the local expert could help to specifically answer the questions these students have. Overall, a goal for this group is to explain how to get involved and share good/reliable information with audiences such as friends, teachers, parents, etc. And, if I'm a high school student that sees someone in trouble, when and how should I get adults involved?
        And finally, I would look for a state group, organization or governmental committee on mental health in this student's state. A simple Google search might help link them with other advocates and possibly even other student groups. Again, these groups could speak to students and help them learn about local concerns. When I searched "mental health" for my state, I found several alliances, boards, and even resources at the Department of Education on how mental health impacts youth at school. I'm sure a similar search could help this group as well. I have a feeling that if this group decides to educate themselves about the issues and local concerns, they will find ways they can make a difference.

(2) What a great question! It covers a lot of territory, so I'm sure you will continue to need to search for what you need. This should get you started, though.

IN GENERAL

>The School Psychologist at your school may be able to help with some or all of these areas to some extent. If you are in a large district, your building SP may be able to connect you with practitioners in other buildings with specialized training, too. Others who already may be in your building include: school social workers, community mental health staff, psychology/health teachers/counselors. Educators tend to be very busy but may have some time for selected portions of your project.

>Pick one thing and do that well, keeping an eye on how your initiative can persist after you graduate and perhaps move away.

>We live in litigious times, so I suggest that you be very careful only to connect people with information sources and stay far away from doing anything that could be considered as "therapy" or "treatment."

AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN MY COMMUNITY

>Check with your county mental health service, if available.

>If there are also agencies nearby providing mental health services to people in your community not primarily from Western European backgrounds, talk with those providers to see what they suggest. I've met some fascinating Native American healers who base their approach on their tribal teachings.... Make sure you include everybody.

https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/What-Can-I-Do

https://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/blog/25-ways-you-can-impact-mental-health-awareness-in-your-community

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL ILLNESSES AND HOW THEY WORK

>Be careful reading formal information about mental illness. Scientific papers try to be very objective and data intensive. I think all those technical terms and statistics can intimidate some people and perhaps even add to the fear that mental illness is too scary or weird. That can translate to thinking people who have mental illness are scary or weird. It's also easy to read a formal description of a mental illness and then suddenly worry that it describes YOU! That's because there is a lot of overlap between common, non-problem behaviors and feelings and symptoms experienced by people who have a diagnosed condition. Take anxiety, for example. We all feel anxious and sometimes that even inhibits our performance. A person with anxiety who is classified as having a mental illness will have much stronger anxiety, it will last for a longer period or time, and it impairs functioning to a much greater degree.

>I think it helps to use "person first" language. When we talk about a "depressed person", the emphasis is on the depression. We could accidentally lose some understanding about how that person experiences life because we know the list of symptoms from the official book of diagnostic categories. Instead, talk about a "person experiencing depression." It may seem like a small thing but words do color how we approach the world.

>I've mentioned *NAMI* above. Most chapters have people who give talks about their particular condition, how it affected them, and what treatments seemed to work.

>Approximately 2/3 of us will have a mental health diagnosis at some point in our lives. All that really means is that our feelings are somehow getting in the way and we sought help for dealing with that. Most of the diagnoses will never lead to hospitalization. For example, grief over the death of a relative might require some talk therapy and perhaps a brief exposure to medication to speed recovery. Nothing too unusual about that.

>There are some conditions that appear to be more biochemically based. For the brain to work smoothly, there needs to be an incredibly small amount of particular chemicals in particular places in the brain for a particular length of time. There are so many ways things could get out of balance, it's a wonder things work as well as they do.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK20369/

RESOURCES HOW TO DEAL WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

>Many conditions respond well to lifestyle changes and modifications to the way we think about our situations. Here is a list of irrational thoughts that can get in our way, for example: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201501/10-thinking-errors-will-crush-your-mental-strength

>We can look up how many people, roughly, have a particular condition and use those statistics to plan for their care. For example, about 2.9% have excessive moods (ranging from way too excited to way too depressed). Students with this condition can be disruptive or non-participants in a classroom. In my experience, schools rarely prepare to deal with this condition, other than to send students home or expel them, even though we know in advance that a high school of 1200 students, could easily have 30 or more students coping with this condition every day. Wouldn't it be great to have schools that had more humane treatments than expulsion?

>The *National Association of School Psychologists* promotes this model for school-based mental health services https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/school-based-mental-health-services

>More than half of students who are male/adolescents/trans attempt suicide, and we lose too many other teens this way. This is a good number to know (and you may have a local equivalent, too): *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* (available 24/7/365) 1-800-273-8255 If you were able to do nothing more than get this number into the pockets of all the students at your school, the pockets of their families and friends, on posters in student-friendly businesses around town, and regularly mentioned in the locally news media, then you will have done a lot to prevent unnecessary deaths.

>*American Psychological Association* has recommendations for talking to teens who may be thinking of suicide. https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/teens-suicide-prevention.aspx

>An online tool from the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration* intended to help people find treatment facilities: https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

PREVENTING TRAGEDIES

>Not all tragedies are preventable, especially natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. It''s a good idea to have neighborhood response teams already in place. Find out if your town has done disaster response pre-planning and if so, how people can get involved.

>Does your school have a crisis prevention & response plan. If not, try: https://www.nasponline.org/professional-development/prepare-training-curriculum

>Having strong, healthy communities can go a long way towards preventing people from feeling alone and seeking a violent solution. A strong, supportive social network is also essential in recovering from physical and emotional shocks.

>The *Search Institute* has studied what factors contribute towards positive youth development and settled on 40 basic items. You can survey people to see how many of these 40 elements are common in your areas. This will tell you what areas need improvement and which areas should be carried on (or maybe even amplified.) Lots of ideas can come from this process. It is intended to develop strong, supportive social networks.

>Another list of positive qualities can be found at https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/what-are-the-habits-of-mind/

>If bullying is a problem, check out the Challenge Day approach: https://www.challengeday.org/

IDEAS/WAYS/EVENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN

>Deciding what events to create will depend in part on the needs in your area, how large & active is your group, your group's interests, funding, and endurance. Seek mentors and groups with similar goals. I suggesting talking to people about what is needed, selecting a focus area, and then beat that drum. Start small, be successful, and others will want to join in.

Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

Protecting immigrant youth http://www.njjn.org/our-work/protecting-immigrant-youth

School Counselor and School Nurse Collaboration: Partnering for K-12 Student Success
   https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1181068

What Adolescents Seeking Help Teach us About a School-Based Counseling Service
   https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10560-017-0503-7

Videos
 >*Our Culture Our Schools Culturally Responsive Education in New York City*
   http://dignityinschools.org/our-culture-our-schools-culturally-responsive-education-in-new-york-city/

 >Colleagues in La Crosse, WI have produced a three minute video describing the work of their
   school-community collaborative. You can access it on our website:
   Go to http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu – in the left col. click on "Where's it happening" –
   On that page scroll down to Lacrosse – it is the last item "Building Better Futures."

    (As you will, more about their work can be accessed from the other links listed there.)

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For information about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
   go to http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

**Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity, promoting whole child development,
and enhancing school climate.**

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For more about a unified, comprehensive. and equitable system of learning supports, see:
   Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide —
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

For more on embedding student/learning supports into school improvement, see
   Improving School Improvement
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html
                Both are available at this time as free resources.

**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**
For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu
Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.
We post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange*
on our website at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm
and on *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/)