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Mental Health Resources for K–12 Schools

Promote better student outcomes and foster safer schools through mental health programs and support.

Mental health is an important part of a child's overall health and well-being that affects how children think, feel, and act. It can play a role in how children handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health disorders without early diagnosis and treatment can cause problems that can continue into adulthood.

Youth mental health is shaped by a combination of factors, including individual factors like genetics, and community factors like school climate. According to recent surveys, young people show alarming increases in the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and other behavioral health challenges that have consistently increased over the past decade.

Schools are critical partners in supporting the mental health and well-being of students. In addition to education, they provide opportunities for social, mental health, and physical health services that can help protect against negative outcomes. Schools can also serve as communities of support, enabling students to develop relationships with supportive adults and peers and helping youth find purpose and belonging.

> Mental health and wellness are innately connected to students' success in the classroom and to a thriving school environment.

By supporting students who are experiencing mental health challenges, schools can help foster a sense of safety and support, prevent worsening of mental health conditions, and create better outcomes. There are several strategies educators, school staff, and school districts can implement to support the mental health of all students, including:

Provide Access to Comprehensive School–Based Mental Health Services

School mental health programming includes an array of services that address prevention, early intervention, and treatment needs of students to facilitate well-being and positive healthy youth development. Comprehensive school-based programs incorporate a team of licensed behavioral health professionals that provide on-site therapy services. School-based mental health services and tele-health programs also allow mental health needs to be addressed without removing students from the learning environment.

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Implement a Continuum of Evidence–Based Prevention Practices

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is an integrated implementation framework for organizing a continuum of evidence-based practices to support each student's educational, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. An effective MTSS framework includes the prioritization of primary prevention practices that establish positive, predictable, and safe environments and routines; secondary prevention, which provides targeted support for students who continue to experience social, emotional, and/or behavioral risk; and, tertiary prevention, which provides intensive and individualized support for students with chronic or intense social, emotional, or behavioral needs.

Adopt a Schoolwide Trauma–Sensitive Approach

In a trauma-sensitive school, all aspects of the educational environment, from workforce training to engagement with students and families to procedures and policies, are grounded in an understanding of trauma and its impact and are designed to promote resilience for all. Schools that implement trauma-sensitive practices can create safer, more supportive environments and enhanced connections among students, families, and staff. Trauma-sensitive strategies include educating school staff about trauma and its effects and promoting physical and emotional safety in relationships and in the environment.

Engage Parents and Legal Guardians

Parents and families have a powerful role in supporting their children's health and well-being at home and at school. Schools can work with parents and legal guardians to educate them about connectedness, engage them in creating healthy and supportive schools, and reinforce the skills taught at school in their home.

Promote Mental Health Literacy

Educators are often the first to notice if a child is struggling or behaving differently. Mental health literacy training programs can empower school staff with skills to recognize and assist students experiencing mental health challenges and better prepare them to make appropriate referrals. These programs can also help change attitudes and perceptions about mental health and reduce the stigma associated with mental health needs and services.

Create Positive, Safe, and Affirming Learning Environments and Promote School Connectedness

Building environments where students feel they are cared for, supported, and belong can have a substantial impact on positive student mental health and well-being, as well as make it less likely for youth to experience risky behaviors such as substance use or violence. A positive school climate reflects attention to fostering social and physical safety, providing support that enables students and staff to realize high behavioral and academic standards, and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, inclusive, and caring relationships throughout the school community. Schools can also promote school connectedness through classroom management and positive youth development programs.

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Resources

SchoolSafety.gov offers a variety of resources, guides, and tools school communities can reference on mental health, including:

Guides, Reports, and Informational Materials

- [Guidance to States and School Systems on Addressing Mental Health and Substance Use Issues in Schools](#): This bulletin provides states, schools, and school systems with information about addressing mental health and substance use issues in schools, including examples of approaches and best practice models to implement related services for students.

- [Protecting Youth Mental Health](#): This U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory offers recommendations for supporting the mental health of children, adolescents, and young adults, including essential recommendations and strategies for schools.

- [Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Needs](#): This guide provides focused information and resources to enhance the promotion of mental health and social and emotional well-being among students. It highlights seven key challenges to providing school- or program-based mental health support across early childhood, K–12 schools, and higher education settings, and presents seven corresponding recommendations.

- [Supporting Mental Health via Technology](#): This information sheet reviews the value of focusing on mental health in schools, with an emphasis on leveraging technology. It highlights practical recommendations schools and districts can use to support their efforts to promote mental health strategies and skills, including links to resources useful for planning and implementation.

Trainings and Tools

- [Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool: Mental and Emotional Health Curriculum](#): This assessment tool module helps school systems conduct a clear, complete, and consistent analysis of curricula that are intended to promote mental and emotional health.

- [National School Mental Health Best Practices: Implementation Guidance Modules](#): These resources — which include modules containing trainer and participant manuals, slide decks, and recorded virtual learning sessions — are designed to help states, districts, and schools advance comprehensive school mental health, as well as engage in a planning process around implementation of services.

- [Ready, Set, Go, Review: Screening for Behavioral Health Risk in Schools](#): This toolkit is designed to help schools through the process of developing comprehensive screening procedures, as well as provide readily available resources to facilitate the implementation of effective behavioral health screening in schools.

- [School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) System](#): This web-based platform offers schools, districts, states, and territories a workspace and targeted resources to support school mental health quality improvement.

- [Toolkit for Schools: Engaging Parents to Support Student Mental Health and Emotional Well-being](#): This toolkit is designed to help education leaders and schools raise parent awareness about school connectedness and its role in supporting student mental health and emotional well-being, and why family engagement both in and out of school is important. It includes sample social media posts, social media graphics, and newsletter text.

Programs, Websites, and Other Resources

- [Creating Trauma-Informed Schools](#): This webpage features tools and materials to help educators, school staff, and administrators understand and respond to the specific needs of traumatized children in a school setting.

- [How to Talk About Mental Health: For Educators](#): This webpage provides general information for educators on student mental health, including what to look for in student behavior and ways to support students and their families.

- [National Center for School Mental Health](#): This technical assistance and training center provides resources, webinars, trainings, and more to strengthen school mental health policies and programs.

- [School and Campus Health](#): This webpage provides information and resources to assist efforts to promote mental health and substance use prevention in schools and on campuses and to provide safe learning environments.

- [School-based Suicide Prevention: Promising Approaches and Opportunities for Research](#): This webinar shares new and innovative practices in school-based suicide prevention, focusing on risk identification, follow-up, and referral for additional services for high-risk youth.

- [School Connectedness Helps Students Thrive](#): This webpage describes school connectedness, the benefits of school connectedness, and the ways schools can take action to help students feel connected.

- [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#): This program offers 24/7 call, text and chat access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing a suicidal, substance use, and/or mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. The corresponding webpage provides additional resources and information for strengthening suicide prevention and mental health crisis services.

> Learn more by visiting www.schoolsafety.gov/mental-health.
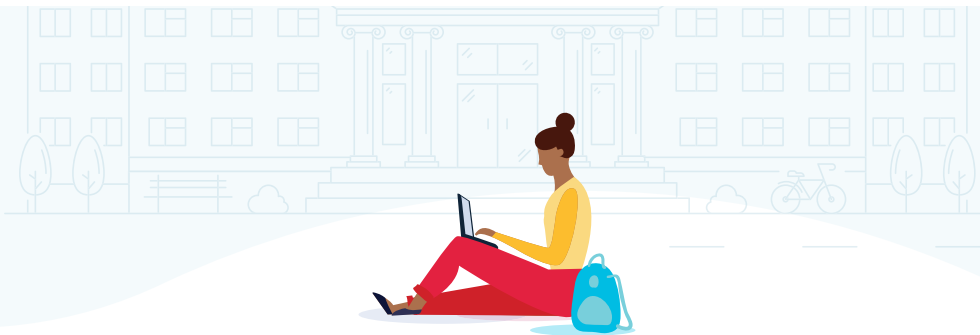
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