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Primary Teacher Mental Health Awareness

Introduction:

On a week-to-week basis young people often spend more time in school than they do anywhere else. The school environment provides an ideal opportunity for students to become aware of positive mental health and mental health difficulties. Teachers are uniquely placed to use this opportunity to offer education around such topics. Teachers have an opportunity through their own role modelling, knowledge and teaching to make a positive difference in the lifestyle choices of students.



HOW CAN I HELP/WHAT CAN I DO:

- Become informed about mental health and illness
- Model a positive attitude towards mental health
- Promote a safe environment
- Connect with students' families
- Establish care teams

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Feelings of alienation or not belonging may make a young person more vulnerable to mental ill health. The quality of a young person's relationship with teachers and peers may affect their sense of belonging. A protective effect and positive environment can be provided by:

- supportive relationships based on mutual respect
- positive interpersonal relationships
- classes that foster and reward the practice of helping and supporting each other
- being available to students
- putting in place a strong pupil led anti bullying policy
- making links with local mental health services and identifying someone you can call upon if you need advice



Nearly 5%

of young people need help from mental health professionals such as doctors, nurses, therapists or counsellors

TELL SOMEONE

Talking about Mental Health is important. A simple conversation can make a big difference.



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DOS & DON'TS

DON'T

- Use negative language
- Refer to people by their illness in a negative way
- Talk about people
- Be judgemental
- Assume someone else is dealing with the issue
- Underestimate the young person's abilities
- Keep the information

DO

- Use respectful language
- Put the young person first
- Talk with young people about their mental health concerns
- Become informed about mental health and illness
- Be supportive and understanding
- Spend time with the person
- Listen to him or her
- Get support, don't try to support a student on your own



Mental Health for children isn't the same as it is for adults. For one thing, there's lots going on such as social learning and expectations, new relationships, peer pressures and transition from a childhood into adolescence.



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Children!

You don't always need professional help. Sometimes self-help can work. A group of young people in St Patrick's Mental Health Services said the following things helped them a lot.



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HOW TO SPOT THE SIGNS

WATCH OUT FOR YOURSELF, YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILY AND WORK COLLEAGUES.
IF YOU RECOGNISE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING WARNING SIGNS,
IT'S TIME TO SEEK HELP.

FEELINGS

- Sad and hopeless without reason for a long time
- Angry, crying, over-reacting most of the time
- Feeling worthless or guilty often
- Being anxious or worried often
- Unable to cope with the loss of someone or something important
- Extremely fearful, unexplained fears
- Worried about being harmed, hurting others
- Concerned about physical appearance or physical problems
- Feeling life is too hard to handle / having suicidal thoughts

EXPERIENCES

- Increasingly declining performance in school, college, work
- Losing interest in things once enjoyed
- Unexplained changes in sleeping patterns
- Unexplained changes in eating patterns
- Avoiding friends, family
- Wanting to be alone all of the time
- Daydreaming too much / poor concentration
- Frightened that your mind is out of control / or controlled
- Hearing voices that cannot be explained
- Persistent nightmares

BEHAVIOUR

- Poor concentration, unable to think straight
- Inability to sit still or focus attention
- Compulsive need to wash, clean things, perform routines numerous times daily to avoid unsubstantiated danger
- Over talkative, disjointed conversations

ACTIONS (causing problems)

- Using / abusing / depending on alcohol or drugs
- Finding ways to eat large amounts of food or abusing laxatives to avoid weight gain. Dieting / exercising excessively
- Excessive risk taking
- Doing things that can be life threatening
- Not socialising/isolating oneself



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For your Mental Health Awareness Project in School....

...CONSIDER

ways of helping others to recognise signs that a young person is struggling with his/her mental health e.g. fact sheet, school talks, posters, school website /magazine etc.

...TACKLE

the stigma about mental illness, which is a huge barrier to young people seeking support. Look at how you and your friends think and talk about mental health/illness and how you can start to fight the stigma.

...AIM

to improve your own and other's awareness about young people's mental health in your school and your community.

...INFORM

yourself and others about ways to sustain good mental health, to recognise the warning signs and to get help for mental health difficulties.

...THINK

about issues affecting mental health such as:
Stress, Family Problems,
Financial Worries,
School Pressures, Drugs,
Alcohol, Bullying,
Online Bullying

Next Steps

- Consider how the whole school can promote positive mental health
- Highlight ways to create awareness among friends, family, teachers and others about how you can support someone with mental health problems
- Consider what peer supports at school can help people to deal with problems e.g. lists of self-help supports for students, new student mentoring programme

Support and help is out there for those affected with mental health problems - You CAN make a difference

EARLY INTERVENTION AND
TREATMENT IS KEY TO RECOVERY

WHAT TO DO?

ASKING FOR HELP IS A SIGN OF STRENGTH
NOT WEAKNESS

St. Patrick's Mental Health Services
For Free Support and Information

Call 01 249 3333

info@stpatsmail.com

Walk in My Shoes Helpline
for 18-25 year olds

Call 01 249 3555

help@walkinmyshoes.ie



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