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Role of school in child's mental health

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Abstract

All young people face significant stress in their life's. Some changes are a part of normal growing up for example growth and hormonal changes, as well as changes in relationships that young people experience with parents and society. The present discusses the role school has to play in promoting healthy emotional development of children. Counselors and other professionals working in schools are well positioned to serve as student advocates family advisors and community partners in supporting wellbeing of children. In many geographic regions, families and schools are the strongest institutions in the child's life. With rapid urbanization, single parent families, geographic mobility, easy access to potential life threatening mechanisms, substances, activities have weakened the family and cultural structures which were once a strong support to the young once. Schools have now become a central position in the life of young children in their development. Therefore schools have the utmost responsibility in the mental health of the children. As the nation is moving forward to universalization of education, schools should expand their roles providing physical and mental health services.

Keywords:

1. Introduction

In Mental health — an essential part of children's overall health — has a complex interactive relationship with their physical health and their ability to succeed in school, at work and in society. Both physical and mental health affect how we think, feel and act on the inside and outside. All children and youth have the right to happy and healthy lives and deserve access to effective care to prevent or treat any mental health problems that they may develop. However, there is a tremendous amount of unmet need, and health disparities are particularly pronounced for children and youth living in low-income communities, ethnic minority youth or those with special needs. Many more are at risk of developing a disorder due to risk factors in their biology or genetics; within their families, schools, and communities; and among their peers. There is a great need for mental health professionals to provide the best available care based on scientific evidence, good clinical expertise, and that takes into account the unique characteristics of the child or adolescent.

McKenzie and Richmond (1998) make the case in the book, *Health is Academic: A Guide to Coordinated School Health Programs*, that the link between children's health status and learning is robust. When discussing health, however, most people think only in terms of physical health and tend to overlook the critical importance of mental health (Donnelly, Eburne, & Kittleson, 2001). Yet physical health and mental health are inextricably connected components of overall well-being (U.S. Surgeon General, 1999). Issues related to mental health, such as low self-esteem, stress, and coping with emotional responses have a clear impact on physical health. Conversely, poor physical health is associated with mental health concerns, such as stress, depression, and anxiety (Donnelly *et al.*, 2001).

Unfortunately, mental health concerns are so common in children and youth—with some disorders such as anxiety more common even than most physical health problems (McLoone, Hudson, & Rapee, 2006)—that they are reaching epidemic levels. Children suffer from a range of social, emotional, and mental health problems including trauma, family conflict, depression, anxiety, ADHD, and substance abuse.

Good mental health is critical to children's success in school and life. Research demonstrates that students who receive social-emotional and mental health support achieve better academically. School climate, classroom behavior, on-task learning, and students' sense of connectedness and well-being all improve as well.

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Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness but also encompasses social, emotional, and behavioral health and the ability to cope with life's challenges.

2. Children's mental health is related to positive school outcomes

Research shows that when students' mental health needs are properly addressed, the likelihood of school success increases. High quality, effective school mental health promotion has been linked to increases in academic achievement and competence; decreases in incidence of problem behaviors; improvements in the relationships that surround each child; and substantive, positive changes in school and classroom climates (Elias, 2006; Greenberg *et al.*, 2004; President's New Freedom Commission, 2003).

Schools are an ideal place to provide mental health services to children and youth.

Unfortunately, too many children and youth with mental health problems are not getting the help they need and, when left unmet, mental health problems are linked to costly negative outcomes such as academic and behavior problems, dropping out, and delinquency. Schools, however, are ideal settings to provide mental health services. School-based professionals like school psychologists know the students, parents, and other staff. The learning environment provides the right context for prevention and intervention. And, importantly, school is where children spend most of their day.

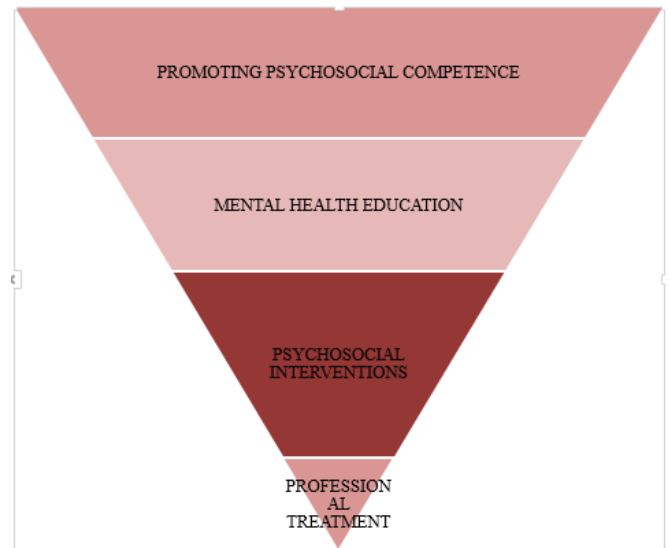
2.1 Teachers' role in promoting mental health

The teachers' role in promoting the emotional and mental well-being of their students is somewhat less specific than those of psychologist, counselor or nurse. Students spend majority of the time with the teachers, signs and symptoms of emotional distress or instability may be first revealed in the class room. Teachers should work actively with mental health professionals in school system to learn about the behavior that should prompt a referral. As a part of overall team the teacher can provide valuable information to psychologist, nurses or counselors'. Teachers have an important role to play in building positive atmosphere. Topics and activities that enhances the curriculum include hold problem solving class meetings, improving communication skills helping students handle anger, frustration and aggression. The teacher should be encouraging to help students develop self-esteem.

3. Intervention Model

Successful model of intervention can be found at four levels

Comprehensive School Mental Health Programme



4. Promoting Psychosocial Competence

Psychosocial competence is the person's ability to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. The most significant intervention for promotion of psychosocial competence in schools are those which enhance the child's own coping resources and competencies. This can be achieved by teaching skills like life skill education. Life skill education aims to provide students with strategies to make healthy choices that contribute to a meaningful life. Life skills are the abilities that help to promote mental wellbeing and competence in young people as they face the realities of life. It helps the young people to take positive actions to protect themselves and to promote health and meaningful social relationship. Life skill facilitates a complete and integrated development of individuals to function effectively as social beings. Life skill education is a basic learning need for all young people. It will help the young people to empower in challenging situations. Various skills like leadership, responsibility, communication, intellectual capacity, self-esteem, Interpersonal skill etc. extends its maximum level, if it is practicing effectively among the youth.

5. Mental Health Education / Instruction

Mental health education should provide information about mental health and illness to students. It helps them to clarify their attitudes, understand their values, and recognize their behavior and emotions as they apply to mental health and illness. Providing knowledge about an illness is not effective unless accompanied by examples. The content of teaching should be present and relevant to student's life. Schools can also serve as training centers for parenting skills, where parents can learn more about child development, parent effectiveness skills and they can receive support to enhance feeling of self-worth and competence.

6. Psychosocial/Mental Health Problem Identification & Intervention

Schools are often places where mental health problems are identified as needing special attention. Risk taking behavior such as smoking, substance abuse, too early sexual activity and life endangering adventures may be an early indication of a young person in danger of more serious problems. Early interventions with risk taking behavior such as these may prevent serious consequences. Psychological problems become evident through changes or deviations in emotions and behaviors. This may include such things as aggressiveness, excessive shyness, poor school attendance, decline in academic performance, irritable, fluctuating moods, changing peer group, obsessive and compulsive behaviour

7. Conclusion

School mental health is a growing movement that recognizes the critical role schools play in addressing the social and emotional needs of students. A growing body of research indicates that providing mental health programs and services in schools, often referred to as school mental health, can improve both academic and treatment outcomes.

Schools may not, however, be universally eager to embrace a mental health agenda as part of their academic mission due to increased pressure to raise academic standards, improve test scores. With scarce resources, they may be reluctant to attend to the mental health needs of students. Schools across the country recognizing the critical role that they can play in all areas of students' life – academics, physical health, and social and emotional well-being. Schools, in partnership with communities and families, have instituted successful programs that promote mental health as part of the overall well-being of children. Research shows that schools with well-functioning and coordinated mental health programs, practices, and policies have a number of positive outcomes for schools and for students, including improved graduation

rates, better classroom climate, higher academic performance, and an increased connectedness to school.

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