

School Based Mental Health Program

New Hanover County Schools and the New Hanover County Health Department have joined together to provide an additional support service for students and their families. A Health Department licensed clinical therapist is available to provide mental health services such as evaluation and treatment of children and adolescents with moderate to severe behavioral and emotional problems. School based mental health services are now available to students and their families at your child's school.

How do I know my child may need this service?

Many physical and emotional signs may suggest when a child has a mental health problem. Problems can range from serious concern (e.g. when a child is in danger of harming self) to those of a less severe concern (e.g. a change in eating habits or sleep patterns, or feelings of frustration). Problems which persist over a long period of time should be a red flag that your child is experiencing some difficulties.

Some behaviors to watch for include:

- * Tearful
- * Having trouble concentrating
- * Frequent complaints of feeling sick
- * Withdrawn from family or friends
- * Sleeping in class
- * Changes in academic performance
- * Not eating at lunch
- * Seen with a new group of friends
- * Acting out in class in ways that are not typical of him/her
- * Talking about death or threatening to harm him/her self
- * Showing anger through aggression or disrespect

Is there any cost to the family for school based mental health services?

There is no out-of-pocket cost to a family for services received at the school; no child will be turned down for inability to pay. If the child has insurance, their insurance will be billed. However, if the child is referred to other services such as psychiatric or community support, there may be a cost.

How do I get my child this service?

To access this service, parents can simply call their child's school and request to speak with the school based therapist. The parent and the therapist can have a confidential discussion about any concerns about a child and whether that child would benefit from the service.

What should I expect?

During the initial appointment - or assessment process - you and your child may be seen individually or together. You will most likely be asked a lot of questions about your current concerns about your child, a history of the problem, and how the child acts in school, with friends and at home.

A wide variety of treatments are available. Medication is only one option among many for certain disorders; the use of medication is dependent upon the individual, the problem, and his/her preferences. Any treatment decision is best made between the therapist and the parent.

All therapists are different, so when you make your appointment, specifically ask what to expect and approximately how long it will last so you and your child can be prepared.

What is the parent's role in services?

Parent involvement is **MANDATORY!** Children will be most successful if their parents are involved in their treatment. Successful therapy usually requires an investment of time and energy on the part of the parent, child, and therapist. The therapist may act as a guide, instructor, cheerleader, and sounding board. However, the parents and child must also participate and take responsibility for putting learning into practice. It is important for everyone involved to monitor change and progress.

Who will know? *Confidentiality*

A therapist and a client engage in a private -- or *confidential*- relationship. The therapist's goal is to protect both the physical and emotional well being of the client. *The legal guardian of a child must give the therapist permission and specific instructions on exchanging information with the school.*

In certain situations, confidentiality must be broken and action taken. Mental Health professionals are required by law to report any situation where a client claims he/she is being hurt, going to hurt him/her self, or going to harm someone else.

What now?

The therapist for Blair Elementary School is Heather Hurd. If you feel your child could benefit from mental health services, you may contact her at 350-2045 x 202.

