

Seeing the WHOLE Picture

How to Understand and Support Students and Families Impacted by Mental Health Concerns

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Youth Mental Health in the School Setting

- Youth mental health issues can severely compromise a child's opportunity for success in school
(Repic, 2005)
- An estimated 20% of school-aged children have an undiagnosed/untreated mental health problem affecting their academic performance
(Puskas & Bernardo, 2007)
- Mental health problems can be detected at a young age and should be treated early as a preventative measure
 - Trajectory for untreated youth mental health disorders is poor
 - Inadequate treatment of mental health disorders among youth will affect their ability to succeed in future educational, employment, and family roles

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Mental Illness

What Mental Illness is:

- Symptoms are a result of abnormal brain functioning
- Rarely caused by stress alone
 - Can be exacerbated by stress
- Mental illness is a brain disorder
- It is common and pervasive

What Mental Illness is NOT:

- It is NOT the consequence of poor parenting
- It is NOT the result of personal weakness or deficits in personality
- It is not caused by poverty
- Only in exceptional cases is it caused by nutritional factors

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Myths

- Children grow out of mental health problems.
- A child can manage a psychiatric disorder through willpower.
- Children don't experience mental health problems.

Facts

- A child's home environment & relationships can intensify a mental illness, but these things don't **cause** the disorder.
- Mental illnesses are the result of biological causes. Mental health disorders are an illness, just like diabetes or leukemia, and not necessarily a behavioral issue.
- Most mental health problems left untreated in childhood become more difficult to treat in adulthood.
- Half of all mental health disorders show first signs before a person turns 14 years old, and three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24.
(mentalhealth.gov)

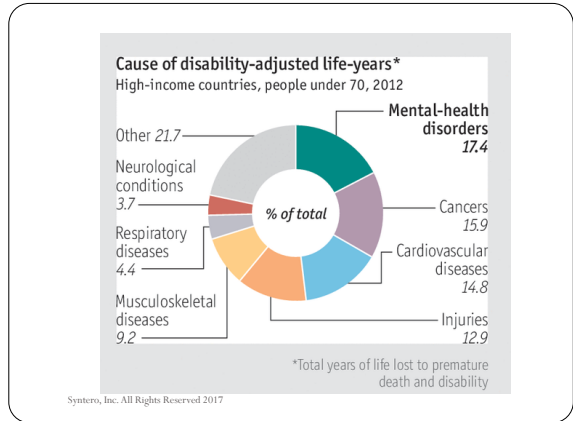
Myth vs Fact

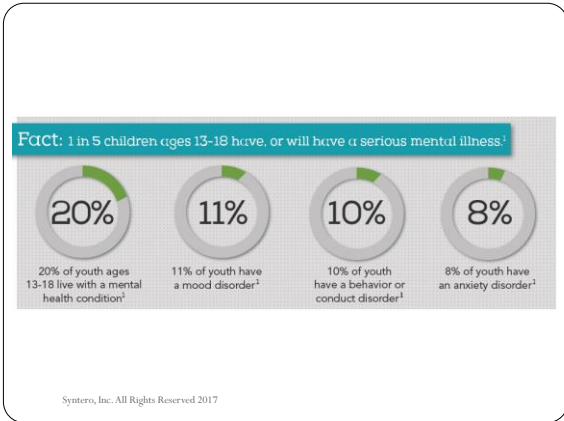
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Mental Wellness

- ...“a state of well-being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community”.
- People with no serious or diagnosable mental health challenges or problems may still lack good mental health

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- High School**

 - Inattention to appearance
 - Excessive risk-taking behaviors
 - Refusal to go to school
 - Thoughts of suicide
 - Feelings of extreme highs and lows
 - Excessive fears, worries and anxieties
 - Social withdrawal
 - Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
 - Strong feelings of anger
 - Cutting/Self-Injurious Behaviors

Middle school

 - May say they feel "stupid"
 - Self deprecating language
 - Low self-esteem
 - Feel unloved/unlovable
 - Reluctant to go to school
 - Thoughts of suicide
 - Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, and/or vandalism
 - Intense fear
-
- Recognize the Changes**
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Signs of Depression

Major changes for two weeks or more in several areas:

Physical Symptoms

- Sick and run down
- Difficulty sleeping
- Poor appetite
- Muscle pains
- Weight loss
- Tired

Thoughts

- "Nothing good ever happens to me"
- "Life is not worth living"
- "My future looks bleak"
- "I'm worthless"
- "It's my fault"
- "I'm a failure"

Behaviours

- Withdraws from others
- Doesn't get things done
- Stops doing enjoyable activities
- Has difficulty concentrating
- Increases alcohol consumption

Feelings

- Overwhelmed
- Unhappy
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- Lacking confidence
- Indecisive

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- If our pancreas has a chemical imbalance, we seek treatment. If our kidneys are not working right, we seek treatment. When our most complex organ, the brain, is not physiologically working right or has a chemical imbalance, for some reason we ignore or hide it. Mental health conditions are far more common among teens than most people would imagine. In fact, one in five youth ages 13 to 18 have or will develop a serious mental illness. Just like many physical conditions, mental illness can be treatable and people can and do recover and live happy, full lives." (KNOW! DFAA)
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Helpful Advice

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- Through research, we know that mental disorders are brain disorders. Evidence shows that they can be related to changes in the anatomy, physiology, and chemistry of the nervous system. (NIMH)
 - Mental illnesses are no different from heart disease, diabetes or any other chronic illness. All chronic diseases have behavioral components as well as biological components. "The only difference here is that the organ of interest is the brain instead of the heart or pancreas. But the same basic principles apply." (APA.org)
- MENTAL ILLNESS IS REAL.**
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- EVEN IF YOU CAN'T SEE IT.**
- It's Science!**
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Black Dog



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc>

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HOW to communicate

- Be genuine
- Be careful about using slang
- Allow for silence
- Try different settings (i.e. walking, playing b-ball, helping clean up after dinner)
- Do NOT compare your own experiences



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HOW to communicate

- Do NOT trivialize their feelings
- Do NOT ask them to justify behaviors
- Watch your body language
- Provide positive feedback/look for youth's strengths
- Help them find language they're looking for

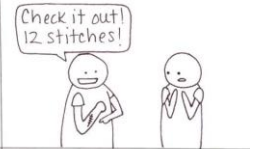


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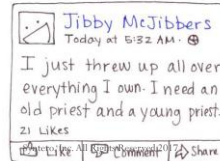
When we break a bone:



When we get a bad cut:



When we get the flu:



When we struggle with mental health issues:



How to Communicate

- "I notice you have not been yourself lately, is there something bothering you?"
- "You seem down and have been spending a lot of time alone. I am here to listen, if you want to talk."
- "I would love to know how you have been doing recently, do you want to grab a bite to eat and talk?"
- "You grades have dropped? I am worried about you. Can we talk about how you are doing?"
- "If you do not want to talk now, I am free later tonight."



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- Create an atmosphere that would encourage children to talk about their feelings:
 - Talk about your own feelings so that they have a role model.
 - Take advantage of moments that lend themselves to a discussion of feelings, for example when watching a television show where mental illness is involved.
- Things to do when children try to express feelings:
 - Give them your full attention. Make eye contact.
 - Check out what you are hearing in their words or interpreting from their behavior.
- Provide your children with skills for handling strong feelings:
 - It's okay and natural for them to have the feelings they're having.
 - Emphasize that talking about feelings can be helpful and that you'll always try to make special time when the child needs to talk.

• Mental Health Association of Southern PA

How to Communicate

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Control

- Help students identify the things that he or she is in control of vs. things that are not in his/her control
- Teach students to understand that no one can control all circumstances, but everyone can change odds by choosing positive behaviors



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Questions?



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Thank you to ADAMH board



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