

MENTAL HEALTH *In Schools*

OCT 2024

ISSUE 2

MANAGING STRESS AND BUILDING RESILIENCE: TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS

October is often a challenging month for educators. The energy from the start of the school year begins to fade, workloads increase, and stress can start to build. This month's newsletter is dedicated to helping you manage stress, build resilience, and maintain your well-being. Additionally, we'll highlight Mental Illness Awareness Week and provide resources for supporting students who may be struggling.



MANAGING TEACHER STRESS: PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR THRIVING, NOT JUST SURVIVING

As the demands of teaching grow, so does the risk of burnout. Managing stress effectively is crucial to maintaining both your well-being and your effectiveness in the classroom. Let's explore a few simple strategies to help you thrive.

Tip 1: Practice Time-Blocking

- Time management is essential for reducing stress. Try breaking your day into blocks of time dedicated to specific tasks (e.g., lesson planning, grading, emails). Avoid multitasking, which can increase stress, and focus on one task at a time.

Tip 2: Establish Work-Life Boundaries

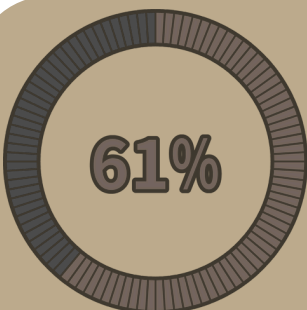
- It's easy to bring work home with you, but establishing boundaries is key to preventing burnout. Set clear work hours and stick to them, allowing time for relaxation, hobbies, and family.

Tip 3: Mindful Breathing Exercise

- Taking a few minutes each day to practice mindful breathing can significantly reduce stress levels. Try deep, slow breathing exercises for 1-2 minutes between classes or at the end of the day.



"Taking care of yourself is the first step in taking care of your students. You cannot pour from an empty cup—prioritize your well-being to give your best to those who need you most."



According to a study by the **American Federation of Teachers**, 61% of teachers report that their jobs are "always" or "often" stressful, making teaching one of the most stressful professions.

MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK: UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Mental Illness Awareness Week (October 1–7) serves as an important reminder to bring mental health to the forefront of our conversations, especially in schools where educators are often the first line of defense in identifying and supporting students with mental health challenges. Understanding the signs of mental health issues and knowing how to respond appropriately can make a significant difference in a student's life.

Here's how educators can take an active role in promoting mental health awareness and support.

Key Signs to Look For in Students

Mental health issues can manifest in different ways, and being attuned to changes in student behavior is key. Students often struggle in silence, and their mental health concerns may present as behavioral or academic issues.

- Withdrawal from friends or activities: If a student who was once engaged in class or social settings starts isolating themselves, this could indicate depression or anxiety.
- Sudden changes in academic performance: Declining grades or inconsistent performance might be a sign that a student is struggling emotionally. Difficulty concentrating or completing assignments is common for students with anxiety or depression.
- Mood swings or persistent sadness: Irritability, mood swings, or prolonged sadness are signs that a student may need additional support. Younger students, in particular, may express emotions like sadness through anger or frustration.
- Excessive worry or fear about school or social situations: If a student is frequently absent, expressing fear about attending school, or showing signs of distress before tests or social activities, they may be dealing with anxiety.

How Educators Can Offer Support

Once you notice signs of distress, taking action is crucial. Creating a supportive environment allows students to feel safe enough to express their concerns, whether they are related to school or their personal lives.

- Create an Open Dialogue: Encourage students to share their thoughts and feelings by normalizing conversations about mental health. Phrases like "It's okay to not be okay" or "How are you really feeling today?" help foster an environment of trust. Check-ins, whether casual or through journaling, can provide insight into their emotional state.

- Build Mental Health Awareness into Lessons: Use literature, videos, or historical figures who have overcome mental health challenges to open discussions in class. This not only reduces stigma but also empowers students to view mental health struggles as part of the human experience. For example, discussing famous figures like Abraham Lincoln, who dealt with depression, can make the topic relatable and destigmatized.

Classroom Activities for Mental Health Awareness Week:

- "Feelings Thermometer": Have students use a "feelings thermometer" where they can anonymously mark how they are feeling on a scale from 1 to 5 (calm to overwhelmed). This can help you gauge how your students are doing on any given day.
- "Stigma-Free Zone": Create a classroom activity focused on reducing stigma. Students can create posters or write reflective essays on the importance of talking about mental health.
- Mindfulness and Breathing Exercises: Incorporate brief mindfulness exercises at the beginning or end of the day. Breathing exercises and short guided meditations can help students learn how to regulate their emotions.

Knowing When to Refer for Additional Help

As much as you can support students in the classroom, there will be situations where professional help is necessary. Being able to recognize when a student needs to be referred to a school counselor or outside mental health professional is critical.

- Know Your School's Resources: Ensure you are familiar with the school's mental health protocols. Some schools have specific intervention teams or processes for referring students to counseling services.
- Partner with Counselors: Build strong partnerships with your school's counselors to ensure there's a clear, supportive path for students in distress. If you're unsure whether a student needs more help, a counselor can provide guidance on the next steps.

continued on next page.



MENTAL HEALTH

In Schools

OCT 2024

ISSUE 2

MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK: UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS (continued)

Suggested Resource for Educators:

- Article: Impact of Anxiety and Depression on Student Academic Progress
- This article provides educators with a deeper understanding of anxiety and depression in the classroom, offering practical tools for support.
- Read the full article here.

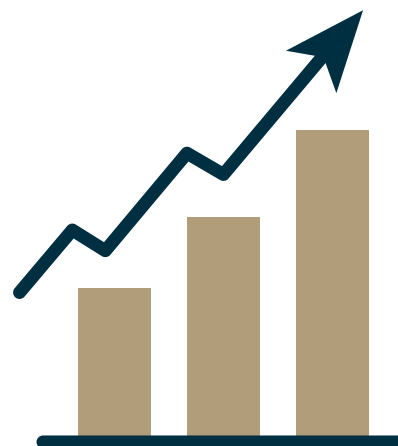
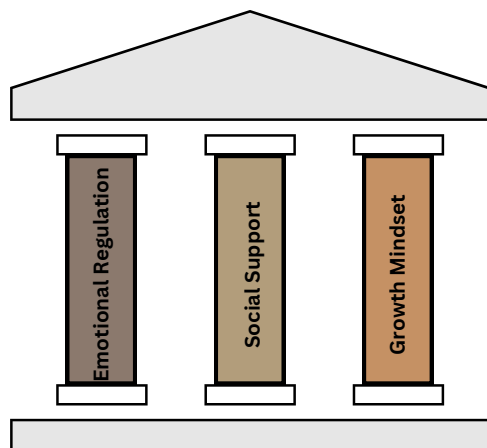
Raising Awareness Among Staff and Colleagues

Promoting mental illness awareness isn't limited to the classroom—it's important for the entire school staff to be informed and prepared to offer support. Use this week as an opportunity to engage with your colleagues by sharing resources and strategies. Hosting brief professional development sessions or discussions around mental health can help create a school-wide culture of awareness and action.

- Youth Mental Health First Aid Training: If available, encourage staff to participate in Youth Mental Health First Aid or similar training to learn how to identify and respond to mental health issues among students and peers.

Additional Resources for Mental Illness Awareness Week

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988
- Crisis Text Line: Text "HELLO" to 741741
- NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness): A wealth of resources on mental health for educators, students, and families.
- Visit NAMI's Website



Teachers who report high levels of resilience are significantly more likely to remain satisfied with their jobs and less likely to experience burnout.

BUILDING RESILIENCE: A FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATORS

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity. As an educator, you face daily challenges that test your resilience, from managing a busy classroom to handling personal stress. By focusing on building your resilience, you can not only cope with the stresses of teaching but also grow and thrive in your role.

Three Pillars of Resilience for Teachers:

- Emotional Regulation: Learning how to manage your emotional responses is key to handling stress. This could involve practicing mindfulness, journaling, or seeking peer support to process difficult emotions.
- Social Support: Building connections with colleagues is essential. Create a support network by scheduling regular check-ins with fellow teachers, sharing experiences, and offering mutual encouragement.
- Growth Mindset: Adopting a growth mindset can transform how you view challenges. Instead of seeing setbacks as failures, view them as learning opportunities that contribute to your professional growth.



GRANVILLE T. FREEMAN LPC, CPCS, CCTP, CGP, BC-TMH
Whole Child Supports Coordinator/ Mental Health Coordinator



granville.freeman@mresa.org

