

MENTAL WELLBEING

In Schools

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NOV 2024

ISSUE 3

GRATITUDE AND CONNECTION: FOSTERING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN SCHOOLS

As we move into November, the season of gratitude and reflection is upon us. This month's focus is on cultivating positive relationships within the classroom and school community, which can significantly enhance both student and staff well-being. Along with the theme of gratitude, we'll explore the impact of fostering strong social connections, as well as highlight an important topic—High Functioning Depression, an often overlooked mental health challenge among students and educators.



"Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for."

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THE POWER OF GRATITUDE: BOOSTING MENTAL HEALTH AND MORALE

November is a natural time to focus on gratitude, which has been proven to positively impact mental health. Encouraging gratitude practices in the classroom and among staff can help create a more supportive, optimistic school environment.

Why Gratitude Matters:

Research shows that practicing gratitude increases positive emotions, reduces stress, and strengthens relationships. For students, especially those who may feel overwhelmed or disconnected, gratitude can offer a mental shift toward optimism and hope.

Gratitude Practices for the Classroom:

- **Gratitude Journals:** Dedicate a few minutes each day for students to write down something they are grateful for. This can be part of their morning routine or a reflective end-of-day exercise.
- **Gratitude Circles:** Begin or end the week with a gratitude circle, where students and staff can share something they appreciate about their peers or experiences from the past week. This strengthens classroom bonds and promotes a positive atmosphere.

Gratitude Practice for Staff:

- **Thank You Notes:** Start a staff-wide gratitude campaign where teachers write thank you notes to each other. This simple act can build camaraderie and remind everyone that their efforts are appreciated.

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HIGH FUNCTIONING DEPRESSION: RECOGNIZING THE SILENT STRUGGLE

As we foster gratitude and connection this month, it's also important to recognize that not all struggles are visible. High Functioning Depression is a mental health condition where individuals may appear to function well in their daily lives, but internally, they are battling significant emotional challenges.

This condition can be particularly hard to detect in both students and educators, as outwardly, those affected may maintain good grades, attend school regularly, or perform well in their job. However, underneath the surface, they may feel persistently sad, unmotivated, or disconnected from joy.

Signs of High Functioning Depression:

- **Chronic Fatigue and Low Energy:** Despite maintaining their responsibilities, individuals with high functioning depression often feel exhausted and unmotivated.
- **Difficulty Enjoying Previously Loved Activities:** A lack of interest in activities that used to bring joy is a key sign.
- **Perfectionism or Overcompensation:** Many individuals with high functioning depression overcompensate for their internal struggle by appearing overly organized or high-achieving, masking their emotional pain.
- **Persistent Sadness or Hopelessness:** Even if they are externally successful, those with high functioning depression may feel a deep, persistent sense of sadness or emotional numbness.

Why This Matters for Educators and Students:

- For educators, high functioning depression can lead to burnout if left unaddressed, as they may feel overwhelmed but unable to express their struggle.
- For students, the pressure to perform while managing emotional pain can result in worsening mental health over time, especially if they feel that asking for help is not an option.

How to Support Students and Staff with High Functioning Depression:

- **Normalize Mental Health Conversations:** Make mental health part of daily conversations in the classroom and among staff. Reducing stigma helps those who are struggling silently to seek help.
- **Check-In Regularly:** Be proactive about checking in with students and colleagues, especially those who seem to be high achievers but may also be quietly struggling.
- **Encourage Professional Help:** High functioning depression requires the same level of support as other mental health challenges. Refer students to school counselors and remind colleagues that seeking professional help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

**Let's Explore
HIGH FUNCTIONING
DEPRESSION**

High-functioning depression refers to people who maintain daily responsibilities while experiencing depressive symptoms.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Persistent feelings of sadness or emptiness
- Changes in sleep patterns (Insomnia or oversleeping)
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Fatigue or low energy
- Appetite changes (increased or decreased)
- Physical symptoms like headaches or digestive issues
- Thoughts of death or suicide

WARNING SIGNS THAT SOMEONE MIGHT BE HIDING DEPRESSION

- Keeping a busy schedule to avoid emotions
- Overachieving or striving for perfection
- Using humor or sarcasm to deflect true feelings
- Isolating from social situations, citing work commitments
- Engaging obsessively in activities like exercise
- Using substances as a coping mechanism

CAUSES OF HIGH-FUNCTIONING DEPRESSION

This section will introduce sustainable practices like efficient and responsible resource use as part of the solution to these challenges.

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS
• Imbalances in brain chemicals • Hormonal imbalances	• Childhood trauma • Chronic stress • Cultural pressures
GENETIC FACTORS	PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS
• A family history of depression • Inherited traits	• Negative thought patterns • Perfectionism

IMPACT ON LIFE

High-functioning depression leads to:

- Imposter syndrome and emotional exhaustion
- Physical health problems due to chronic stress
- Relationship struggles and isolation
- Difficulty maintaining work-life balance
- Reduced quality of life

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE
24/7 CALL, TEXT

SEEK ASSISTANCE in your journey by reaching out to a Mental Health Professional
IN CASE OF CRISIS use the new 988 Hotline through text or call.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)	Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)	Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)	Medication (antidepressants)	Mindfulness practices and meditation
A structured, goal-oriented therapy that helps individuals identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviors.	A therapy focused on improving communication and relationships to address underlying issues contributing to depression.	A therapy that uses guided eye movements to help individuals process and heal from trauma and distressing experiences.	Prescription medications that help regulate brain chemicals to reduce symptoms of depression.	Techniques that promote awareness and presence, helping individuals manage stress and emotional responses.

Lifestyle changes (exercise, sleep habits)

Adjusting daily habits like regular physical activity and maintaining good sleep hygiene to support overall mental health.

KNOWING MORE, HELPS YOU ACT SOONER

Take the necessary steps to listen to your body, know the changes in your behavior, and seek out the assistance to ensure you are the best possible version of yourself!

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BUILDING CONNECTIONS: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATORS

As educators, fostering connections between students, as well as between staff members, is essential for promoting emotional well-being. When students and staff feel connected, they are more likely to thrive academically and socially.

Creating a Culture of Connection in the Classroom:

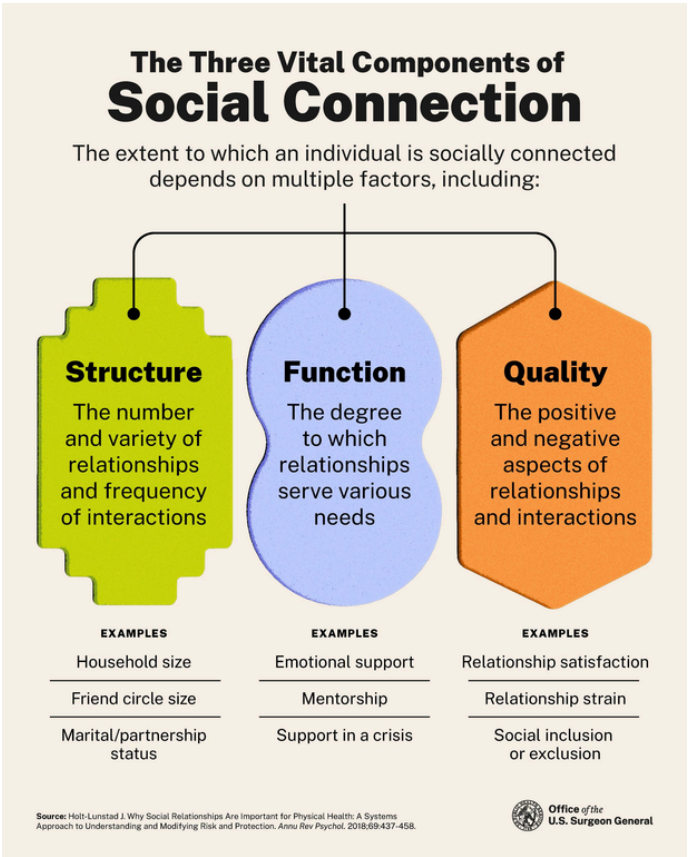
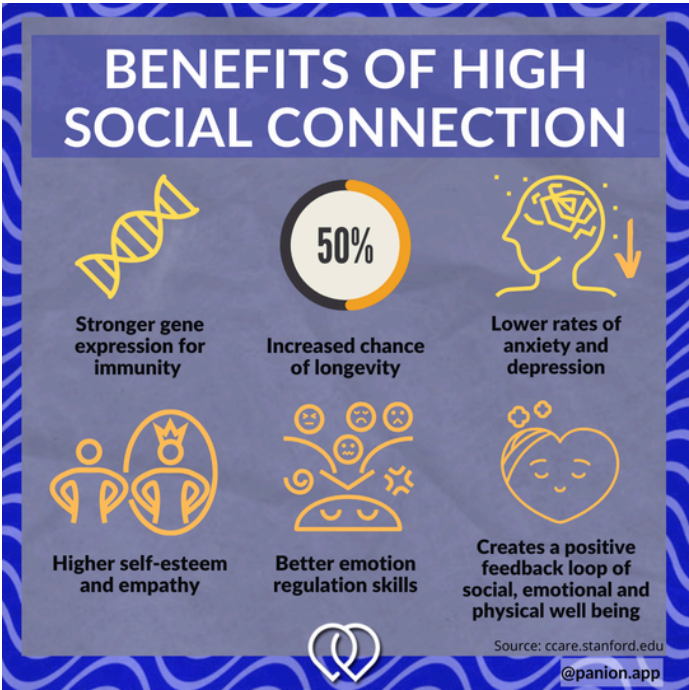
- **Empathy and Kindness Projects:** November is an excellent time to encourage kindness projects, where students perform small acts of kindness for each other, or collaborate on community service projects that give back to those in need. This can strengthen their sense of purpose and community.
- **Peer Support Systems:** Consider implementing a peer buddy system in your classroom, pairing students to help each other academically and emotionally. Peer support is a powerful way to boost confidence and help students feel connected.

Strengthening Staff Relationships:

- **Staff Well-Being Check-Ins:** Organize brief weekly check-ins with staff to discuss mental health and stress management strategies. Create a safe space where teachers can express concerns and receive peer support.

CAPACITY BUILDING:

- **Creating Harmony and Belonging as a Solution to Chronic Absenteeism** on October 29 at 5:00 pm ET. Hosted by Education Week
- **Creating a School Culture That Values Student Voice** on October 29 at 5:00 pm ET. Hosted by edWeb
- **Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence RULER** info session on October 30 at 12pm ET.
- **School Safety & Mental Health: Supporting Georgia School Districts** - Hosted by Daybreak Health on November 14 at 12 noon ET.



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