Making a Difference - Supporting Classroom Educators through Child and Youth Mental Health Issues

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Making a Difference

◆ The Making a Difference guide is a 92 page resource that consists of 4-8 page sections on different mental health issues.

◆ The guide outlines the importance of mental health and how to discuss mental health in the school setting.

◆ Ontario based document developed in Hamilton out of McMaster University.
Mental Health in the Classroom

- Children can experience mental health problems that range from mild to severe
- In a classroom of 30 students, about 5 to 6 will be facing a mental health problem, and 3 to 4 of them will have a problem that interferes with their daily life (Waddell & Sheppard, 2002). That amounts to 1 in 5 children with a mental health problem, which includes anxiety and depression.
Causes

- Result from a combination of factors
- Can be triggered by the stress of schoolwork, relations with peers, conflicts with family
- MH problems can be sustained by various factors so working together is critical
Educational Implications of Mental Health Problems

- The child may have difficulties maintaining regular progress at school
- The children with severe disorders may need special support guided by an Individual Program Plan (IPP)
- Educational programs for these children include developing social skills, increasing self-awareness, self-control, and self-esteem
- Students with learning difficulties may be at higher risk for mental health problems
- Early intervention can reduce interruptions to the child’s school work and social disruptions
When to be concerned?

- Signs that children may be struggling with MH problems
  - behaviours/moods that are not age-appropriate
  - behaviours that are much more dramatic than their peers
  - behaviours that continue for longer than usual

- Behaviours are not proof: three things to consider
  Frequency – Duration - Intensity
Signs a student may be experiencing a mental health problem

- Emotional/Behavioural signs
  - overly withdrawn, quiet or doesn’t engage
  - low self-esteem, feelings of failure/worthlessness
  - increased irritability, which can appear as disobedience or aggression
  - feeling hopeless or overwhelmed
  - unstable moods – unpredictable
  - short fuse and lashing out when frustrated
  - extreme worries/fears that interfere with friendships, schoolwork, or play
  - severe mood swings affecting relationships with others
  - drastic change in personality or behaviour
  - extreme sadness lasting two weeks or more
  - refusal to go to school on a regular basis
Signs a student may be experiencing a mental health problem

- **Academic signs**
  - fidgeting, constantly moving around
  - poor grades in school despite trying hard or a noticeable decline in classroom participation
  - poor attention to detail/careless mistakes in schoolwork
  - does not appear to listen when spoken to
  - does not follow instructions or finish tasks
  - easily distracted
  - forgetful in daily activities
  - difficulty staying focused on one thing
  - bores easily
  - loses or forgets things often
  - difficulty attending to individual work or class activity
  - dreamy or unable to pay attention
  - afraid to participate in class or answer questions
  - difficulty managing during free time while unsupervised and in larger groups
Signs a student may be experiencing a mental health problem

Communication/Social Skills signs

- spends most of their time alone
- goes on and on about a subject and takes over a conversation
- acts ‘silly’ in a group to get attention but doesn’t fit in
- poor motor skills
- speaks without thinking
- barges into social activities
Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry or unease.

An Anxiety disorder is when the level of anxiety is great enough to interfere with a child’s everyday activities.

It is a psychiatric condition that may require medical or psychological treatment.
Common signs that a child may be struggling with anxiety

- Frequent absences
- Refusal to join in school social activities
- Decline in grades or unable to work to expectations
- Often spends time alone, has few friends, or has difficulty making friends
- Physical complaints that are not attributed to a health problem
- Excessive worrying about homework or grades
- Frequent bouts of tears
- Easily frustrated
- Fear of new situations
Anxiety Disorders: Suggestions for Supporting the Student in School

1. Slow steps are key to sustaining progress.
2. Reward brave, non-anxious behaviour
3. Encourage them to take small steps toward accomplishing the feared task
4. Check in with the student at the beginning of the day
5. Learn what situations the student can handle and how to respond when they are unable to cope
6. Recognize and reward small improvements
7. Provide a learning environment where mistakes are viewed as a natural part of the learning process
8. Encourage and reward all positive steps in fighting anxiety
9. Provide advance warning of changes in routine
More Information

 ◆ Anxiety and Depression Association of America

 ◆ Anxiety Canada
   https://www.anxietycanada.com/parenting/parent-child

 ◆ Canadian Mental Health Association
   https://cmha.ca/documents/anxiety-disorders

 ◆ My Health Alberta
Almost every person has some episode of difficult behaviour in their childhood.

Sometimes there are obvious reasons for the difficult behaviour (frustration, conflict, tired).

When a behaviour problem becomes severe and chronic, it may become a behaviour disorder.

Behaviour disorders affect 3.3% of Canadian young people (Waddell, Shepherd, 2002).
Signs that a child may be struggling with a behaviour problem

- Continues to behave poorly for several months or longer; is repeatedly disobedient, talks back, or physically aggressive
- The behaviour is out of the ordinary, and seriously breaks the rules; family or community
- The behaviour is much more than childish mischief or adolescent rebellion
What are Behaviour Disorders?

- ODD - Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- CD – Conduct Disorder

What Causes Behaviour Disorders?

- Difficult behaviours are often seen comorbid with other conditions like anxiety, depression, ADHD. The behaviours are often a reaction to those conditions.
Behaviour Disorders: Suggestions for Supporting the Student in School

1. Modelling: Model the quiet respectful behaviour you want from the student
2. Focusing: Be sure to have everyone’s attention
3. Monitoring: Move around classroom to ensure everyone is on the right page
4. Non-verbal cuing: Hand gestures, facial expressions etc. to let student know that their behaviour is unacceptable
5. Low-Profile Intervention: many major problems start out as minor ones that escalate. Ensure students are not rewarded for misbehaviour – centre of attention
6. Positive behavioural expectation: describe the behaviour you want not the one you are discouraging
More Information


- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

- Canadian Paediatric Society
  https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behaviour-index
Mood Problems

- Most common mood problem is depression
- Depressed teens are at a higher risk of suicide
- Approximately 3.5% of children and youth have a mood disorder serious enough to require treatment
Signs that a child may be struggling with a mood problem

- Prolonged sadness that lasts weeks or months
- Low energy and loss of interest in activities
- Low self-esteem
- Isolated, quiet, avoids interaction with others
- Irritable
- Defiant or disruptive
- Fidgety or restless, distracting other students
- Negative talk about self, the world, or future
- Excessive crying over relatively small things
- Frequent complaints of aches and pains
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, remembering
Signs that a child may be struggling with a mood problem continued

- Difficulty getting things done, such as homework
- Difficulty starting tasks, staying on task or refusal to attempt tasks
- Sits in the back of the class and does not participate
- Refusal to do schoolwork, and general noncompliance with rules
- Responds with “I don’t know”, “It’s not important”, “No one cares, anyway” when asked about incomplete work
- Showing up late or skipping school
- Frequently absent from school
- Drop in grades
Mood Disorders: Suggestions for Supporting the Student in School

1. Find ways to ensure the student has chances to achieve - being successful increased self-esteem
2. Make positive statements that reflect his/her past successes
3. Make special contact with the student everyday
4. Break assignments into smaller pieces, give extra help in setting up schedules or study habits
5. Students who are depressed are more sensitive to criticism. Corrections should be accompanied by praise and support
6. Depressed students feel they have little to contribute. Show confidence, respect, and faith in the student’s abilities
7. Ask open-ended questions with no right or wrong answers to minimize embarrassment
8. Check your Board’s procedure for dealing with students who are expressing suicidal thoughts. Seek direction from your principal if you have questions about what to do
More Information


◆ National Institute of Mental Health

◆ Mood Disorders Canada
  www.mooddisorderscanada.ca
Attention Problems

- Students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may experience many difficulties that can affect their social skills.
- As a result, they experience feelings of sadness and rejection.
- They are at high risk of school failure.
- Many also have other psychiatric conditions – anxiety, mood problems, ODD, CD.
- They also have higher rates of substance use especially if their emotional and behavioural problems are not addressed.
Common signs that a child may be struggling with attention problems

- **Signs of hyperactivity**
  - not able to sit still
  - non-stop talking
  - leaving seat when sitting expected
  - difficulty playing quietly

- **Signs of inattention**
  - easily distracted
  - fail to pay attention to details, make careless mistakes
  - forgets things such as pencils
  - rarely follow directions completely or properly
  - not listening to what is being said
  - strong dislike for schoolwork that requires sustained mental effort
Common signs that a child may be struggling with attention problems continued

- **Signs of impulsivity**
  - inability to suppress impulses such as making inappropriate comments
  - shouting out answers before a question is finished
  - hitting other people
  - difficulty waiting for their turn
  - easily frustrated
  - poor judgment
ADHD: Suggestions for Supporting the Student in School

1. Find out what they love – tap into emotional side of learning
2. Break goals into smaller ones
3. Record each day’s homework into a journal
4. Provide encouragement or rewards
5. Use checklists
6. Provide a specific, organized place for activities
7. Break down task or assignment into manageable parts
8. Write the assignment and rewards on the board, repeat aloud to reach multiple senses
More Information

- Teach ADHD [www.teachadhd.ca](http://www.teachadhd.ca)
- Centre for ADHD/ADD Advocacy, Canada [www.caddac.ca](http://www.caddac.ca)
- Children with Attention Deficit Disorder [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

Conclusion

- Parents - recruit the parent as your partner in solving the problem, and avoid an argument about whether the problem exists.
- Transitions - triggers for stress
- Students - There may be a reason the student has chosen to speak to you, and you can help them find someone else they can talk to.
- Discussion - In spite of the fact that mental health problems affect one in five young people, less than 15% of those young people ever receive any help
Resources


◆ Mental Health Smart Cards
Q&A