



Mental/Behavioral Health Tips and Tools

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Mental Health Issues Seen in Schools

Internal Factors

- Neurological: ADHD, cognitive deficiency
- Medication: EDU, Administration, SE
- Injuries: intentional/unintentional
- Physical disabilities: anatomical structure, vision, hearing
- Psychosomatic: anxiety-related
- Concerns of abuse/neglect: safety, confidentiality
- Substance Use: EDU, screening, intervention, referral
- Reproductive Health; EDU, intervention, referral
- Health and Hygiene Issue:
- General: motivation, mood, resilience

External Factors

- Household dynamics
- Structure of support
- Child abuse and neglect
- Parental divorce or separation
- Domestic violence
- Substance abuse
- family mental health concerns
- Grief and loss related to illness or death of family members including pets
- Military deployment
- School crises/natural disasters

Barriers to applying the school nursing process to mental health care

- Constraints of a busy school nurse's office
- Privacy and confidentiality concerns
- Issues related to role delineation within the school setting
- Limitations of screening instruments (both universal and targeted)
- Involvement of families – associated stigma, cultural considerations
- Limited resources for referral and services
- Inadequate education and training needed to provide services in a pediatric population

Assessing Behavioral Health Concerns in School (from NIMH Toolkit, resource below)

Depression: “In the past few weeks, have you felt so sad or depressed that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do?”

Anxiety: “In the past few weeks, have you felt so worried that it makes it hard to do the things you would like to do or that you feel constantly agitated/on-edge?”

Impulsivity/Recklessness: “Do you often act without thinking?”

Hopelessness: “In the past few weeks, have you felt hopeless, like things would never get better?”



- Anhedonia: “In the past few weeks, have you felt like you couldn’t enjoy the things that usually make you happy?”
- Isolation: “Have you been keeping to yourself more than usual?”
- Irritability: “In the past few weeks, have you been feeling more irritable or grouchier than usual?”
- Substance and alcohol use: “In the past few weeks, have you used drugs or alcohol?” If yes, ask: “What? How much?”
- Sleep pattern: “In the past few weeks, have you had trouble falling asleep or found yourself waking up in the middle of the night or earlier than usual in the morning?”
- Appetite: “In the past few weeks, have you noticed changes in your appetite? Have you been less hungry or more hungry than usual?”
- Other concerns: “Recently, have there been any concerning changes in how you are thinking or feeling?”

Suicide/Self Harm Assessment and Actions

Know what to say.

- Express concern.
- Are you currently feeling safe at school?
- Are you having thoughts of harming yourself?
- Do you have a plan to harm yourself?
- Have you ever tried to hurt yourself in the past?
- Have you been feeling hopeless?
- Are you having thoughts that you want to kill yourself?
- Do you have a plan?
- What has prevented you from acting on that plan?

Know your In-School resources

- Crisis Team Members
- Adjustment counselors
- School psychologists
- Other licensed mental health professionals

Know the crisis intervention process in your school. For example:

- Who stays with the student
- Who calls whom (i.e., parent/guardian, mobile crisis team, EMS)
- Know your out-of-school resources:
- Mobile crisis team for evaluation in school
- Local providers and clinics
- EMS for evaluation at emergency department

Impact of Trauma on Learning:

- Undermines the development of language and communication skills
- Thwarts the establishment of a coherent sense of self
- Compromises the ability to attend to classroom tasks and instructions



- Interferes organization and memory
- Hinders cause-and-effect relationships impacting socialization
- Interferes with the capacity for creative play and problem solving
- Contributes to negative classroom behavior; trust and security issues
- Developmental/education delay; speech, reading, processing

From: Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2005.

Interventions-General Guidance

- Use ABC's of School nursing
 - Dial 911? Emergent or Urgent?
 - What non-medical or behavioral interventions are needed?
 - Are there safety concerns?
- Who needs to be notified and for what purpose?
- Medical Intervention (emergent referral, first aid)
- Safety Intervention (person, building, equipment)
- Non-Urgent Behavioral Intervention (stress reduction, anticipatory guidance)
- Team Notification (Administration, Parent/Guardian, School Counselors, Administrators, Pediatrician/Outside Providers)
- Documentation
- Possible ongoing intervention to be determined by the Team
- Follow-up with student

Communications Tips

- Maintain eye contact
- Face the speaker
- Be open minded and flexible
- Do not judge actions or behaviors
- Summarize/paraphrase what the person says/does
- Pay attention to your facial expression
- Wait for the person to pause before speaking (silence is OK)
- Do not interrupt
- Be aware of your body language
- Remain calm and relaxed
- Monitor your voice (slow and low)
- Breathe deeply (increases O₂ for optimal thinking and behaving)
- Be genuine and attentive
- Affirm presence; "Thank you"
- Listen, reflect, clarify "Let me see if I understand this right"
- "So on the one hand... and on the other hand..." Develop discrepancy between goals & values and current behaviors to elicit if change behavior is present. Explore without judgment.
- Do not agree, reassure, judge or praise. Avoid should, ought or blame. "You seem to be concerned.. You seem to be doing well with this"
- Take the "I" out of it.
- Don't give unsolicited advice prematurely "Would you like some information about?"



Interrupting the Behavioral Health Cycle Using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Concepts:

- Trigger – What is the situation: can it be avoided or do we need to figure out a way to deal with it?
- Thoughts – What is the evidence? What was said or done? Do we need to interrupt the thoughts?
- Regroup, time out, diversional activity (music, game, mandala, calming App)
- Emotions – Label it: fear, anger, joy, sadness, surprise and disgust. (different theories), 1-10 scale
- Physical sensations – What is going on in the body, what does it feel like, do you like that feeling? How can we minimize that feeling? Hydration, Warm pack, ice pack, suck on ice, walk, rocking chair, breathing exercises (demonstrate) 7/11, box breathing, nose/mouth rotation,
- Behaviors – avoid or learn strategies for stress management (skills acquisition, referral, apps to use

Documentation (MDPH, School Health Unit, Monthly Status Report, 2018)

1. Behavioral Health Assessment: include all behavioral health issues
2. Anti-Bullying Interventions by District Protocol: include all interventions to prevent, reduce or elimination
3. Coping Enhancement/ Reassurance Check-in / Self-Calming: include anticipatory guidance, self-monitoring, relaxation skills and other interventions used for stressors, or concerns that interfere with meeting school and life demands.
4. Restraint/Seclusion Assessment and/or Monitoring: include all interventions provided by school nurses when a student is restrained or secluded as defined by school district policy.
5. Stress/ Anxiety Reduction / De-escalation: include inventions that allow the student to discuss anxious or worrisome feelings especially when a situation cannot be altered such as verbalization, supportive listening, etc). Also include allowing a student a “time out” to recompose self or to discuss concerns. Include interventions that are provided to reduce angry or out-of-control behaviors.
6. Monitor for Self-Harm / Suicide Ideation: include monitoring for self-injury, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, etc.
7. Social Skills Support: interventions by the school nurse that promote self-advocacy, goal directed behaviors, socially appropriate and successful interactions, such as those often needed by students with ADHD or Autism Spectrum Disorder.
8. Relationship Guidance: include providing guidance to promote healthy social, peer, family, romantic, sexual relationships.
9. Substance Abuse Assessment: include any and all assessments, regardless of outcome, to determine if an individual is under the influence of a substance. Include alcohol, drugs, inhalants, tobacco or other unknown substances.
10. Grief counseling: include both individual and group interventions that assist in coping with grief and loss.
11. Other Behavioral Health Interventions: Please include all follow-up interventions after SBIRT and other behavioral health screenings.

Resources:

CDC Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html>



[NASN Position Statements](#)

Behavioral/Mental Health of Students, The School Nurse's Role in (Amended August 2018)
Chronic Absenteeism, School Nurses - An Integral Member of the School Team Addressing (Adopted June 2018)
Chronic Health Conditions (Students with): The Role of the School Nurse (Revised June 2017)
Concussions - The Role of the School Nurse (Revised June 2016)
LGBTQ Students: The Role of the School Nurse (Revised 2016)
Prevention and Treatment of Child Maltreatment – The Role of the School Nurse (Adopted June 2018)
Restraints, Seclusion and Corporal Punishment in the School Setting, Use of (Adopted June 2015)

[JAMA article:](#)

Whitney DG, Peterson MD. US National and State-Level Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Disparities of Mental Health Care Use in Children. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2019; 173(4):389–391. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.5399

NIMH Resources:

Brief Suicide Safety Assessment Guide: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/research/research-conducted-at-nimh/asq-toolkit-materials/inpatient/brief-suicide-safety-assessment-guide.shtml>

Nursing care plans: Insomnia

<https://nurseslabs.com/insomnia/#nursing-assesment-for-insomnia>

STAHL, Psychopharmacology

<https://stahlonline.cambridge.org/>

Signs of Suicide Prevention Program (SOS)

<http://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/sos-signs-suicide>

Preventing Suicide Toolkits:

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669>

Trauma Resources:

Massachusetts Advocates for Children (2005) *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*

<https://traumasensitiveschools.org/tlpi-publications/>

Trauma Sensitive Schools: <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/>

Youth Risk Behavior Survey information

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trendsreport.pdf>

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2019/01/09/health-and-risk-behaviors-mass-youth-2017.pdf>