

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS *for* OUR STUDENTS

Life Requires Mental Health

We all need to have good mental health, just as we need good physical health. Mental health simply means we are mentally sound, content, and productive rather than being overburdened by stress, sadness, worry, or an inability to think straight.

When we have good mental health we have the mental fortitude to face and overcome challenges so we can learn, grow, and live our lives in a way that is satisfying.

Some of our success in life not only relies on our mental wellbeing, but also on our ability to adapt, cope, or find help and support when we need it. Coping skills and a good support system can be almost as good as not having any problems in the first place.

What Research Tells Us

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 21% of children ages nine to seventeen have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder that causes some impairment. Unfortunately, only 20% of children with mental disorders are identified and receive mental health services, according to U.S. Public Health Service. The U.S. Surgeon General tells us that early and effective mental health treatment can prevent a significant proportion of delinquent and violent youth from future violence and crime. Mental health services can help

children and adolescents to succeed in school, develop more fully, and become more successful in life.

Mental Health Matters for Our Students

Due to recent school violence in our country, mental health has become an increasing concern. Thus, it is important for us to consider the mental health services available in our community for this reason as well as for the everyday challenges. For example, our lifestyles seem to have more stress and pressure with each generation. Current NPAS students will need to be prepared to face increasing pressures from our fast paced, demanding and competitive society, as they will be asked to work longer hours, be bombarded with information, and make do with less money, exercise, sleep, nutrition and free time. If trends continue, our students' generation may also have fewer connections to family and neighbors and, as a result, less trust in one another. As we prepare students to face the challenges of the 21st Century, we also need to teach them to take care of themselves both mentally and physically.



What Can We Do As Parents?

People don't like to talk about mental health challenges because of possible social stigma of being "crazy" or "different," but mental disorders are not contagious and professionals know how to help. Mental health challenges like anxiety, depression, or even ADHD can be overcome or improved with support. Parents worry that their child's mental challenges may reflect

poorly on their parenting. However, most mental disorders are brain-based conditions that can be triggered in any of us due to stress level, lifestyle, or a significant life event.

Children and teenagers may not always be in control of what is going on with their bodies, brain, or emotional state so they need help identifying their emotions and regulating their behaviors.

Parents don't need to be able to fix an issue that their student is having, but it is important to recognize when a problem has become something more than they can handle and to seek support.

A great social worker once said, "It is not what happens to you in life that matters. It is what you choose to do next that counts."

We need to tell our kids not to be afraid to reach out and consult a friend, school personnel, or professional for advice. We are here to help and sometimes recognizing and talking to someone about an issue can make all the difference.

Where to Seek Help at School

In the New Prague School District there are several mental health services provided to students. Each building is equipped with a small team that works together to make sure students basic personal, social, emotional, and behavioral needs are supported:

- Early childhood and all three elementary schools have their own social worker and a part-time school psychologist for each building.
- The middle school has a counselor, a social worker, and a part-time school psychologist.



- The high school has three counselors, a part-time social worker, and a part-time school psychologist.
- The alternative learning center has a part-time social worker and access to the three high school counselors.

These school staff are not licensed to provide a diagnosis, medication, or formal therapeutic counseling to students, but they do provide individual and group support to students with issues such as ADHD, depression, grief, bullying, academic failure, difficulty with friendship, social anxiety, or family adjustment.

In the school setting, many problems can be addressed by identifying a student's issues and problem solving with students, teachers, and parents. When a student's issues are more serious, families may need help finding mental health professionals, special education services, county services, or outside resources. One unique program available to students is the Scott County Connect Program where licensed therapists come into our schools every week. These psychologists from the Scott County Mental Health Center collaborate with school staff to identify students with a need for a diagnostic assessment or professional level counseling.

Recommendations for Parents

We know that children and teenagers need to be mentally and physically healthy before

they can learn. Here are some recommendations for a supporting your child's mental health:

- Love and encouragement from family goes a long way in improving a student's self-confidence and ability to face and overcome challenges.
- Opportunities to play, to adventure, or to participate in sports and activities are important for children's development, learning, happiness, and health.
- A holistic approach to exercise, diet, sleep, routines, and reducing stress and screen time, all help students live a more balanced and regulated lifestyle. Taking care of the body will help the mind.
- Appropriate guidance, discipline, and structure at home helps students feel safer in a predictable environment and helps students regulate themselves.
- Building relationships within families, schools, and communities provides a safety net and support system in times of crisis, and also helps people heal after a crisis.
- Communication. No one has to deal with these issues alone. There are resources to help. If you are worried seek more information from the pediatrician or school. Trust your gut instincts and be proactive, which can be key in preventing future issues.
- Therapy, sometimes in conjunction with medication, has been shown to be the most effective treatment in teaching emotional and behavioral regulation.
- Mental health professionals are everywhere including your student's school so just ask.

School Psychologists support student mental health.

Resources

Many additional organizations provide help with mental health issues. Here are a few of those:

United Way 2-1-1 (First Call for Help)

Dial 2-1-1 or 1-800-543-7709

A free and confidential human services helpline available 24/7.

Crisis Connection

612-379-6363

A non-profit mental health counseling agency providing telephone crisis counseling services.

Carver/Scott Mental Health Crisis Program

Crisis Line 952-442-7601

Has a mobile on-site response team to assess and stabilize a crisis situation or do assessments and interventions 24/7.

Center for the Challenging Child

parentingmojo.com

Parenting coaches available.

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

chadd.org

