

# Mental Health Is Essential! And Key to Success At School

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# Today's Objectives

## Examine

- Current state of student mental health.
- Links between mental health and learning, school performance and success.
- Barriers to getting kids the help and support they need.

## Discuss

- Needs and obstacles of children and youth with mental health challenges and how they might affect them at school.
- How to recognize and support student's social, emotional, behavioral and mental health needs.

## Share

- Keys to success, tips, strategies, tools and resources.
- Information about new and existing school-based initiatives including several promising programs, practices and projects.



## Links between positive mental health and school success are strong! Research shows...

Mentally healthy kids are more successful in school and life.

Students with access to social, emotional and mental health supports achieve better both academically and socially.

While students with unmet mental health needs often experience:

- frequent absences
- reduced academic and social success
- increased school removals, failure or drop out

Which can lead to other negative outcomes such as out of home placements, court involvement, substance use and even suicide.





# Why Mental Health Matters at School

- Mental health problems are common and often develop during childhood and adolescence with  $\frac{1}{2}$  developing by age 14 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  by age 24.
- They are treatable! Early detection & intervention strategies for mental work. They improve resilience and the ability to succeed in school.
- Schools are a natural setting to provide comprehensive prevention and early intervention and are in a unique position to provide it.
- Kids across our state are struggling. Unmet needs can further complicate their daily functioning and learning.





**October 2021** American Academy of Pediatrics declared a [national emergency](#) in child and adolescent mental health.

**December 2021** The US Surgeon General Issues the [Protecting Youth Mental Health Advisory](#).

**March 2022** CDC warns of an accelerating adolescent mental health crisis following a survey where:

- More than 4 in 10 teens reported feeling “persistently sad or hopeless”,
- 2/3 responding to the survey reporting difficulty with schoolwork, and 1 in 5 shared they had contemplated suicide.

**May 2023** The U.S. Surgeon General issues two new advisories  
[Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation Advisory](#)  
[Social Media and Youth Mental Health Advisory](#)

# Youth Mental Health Crisis

## *'Silver Linings'....*

- A renewed sense of urgency!
- Increased understanding and focus on the problem and real issues kids are facing
- Increased commitment and funding to seek and implement solutions to better support children's mental health.
- Increased sharing and dissemination of tools and strategies that work.
- Reports and advisories also share some good news and additional evidence of the critical role schools can play!







- 1 in 5 children and youth have a diagnosable mental, emotional or behavioral disorder.
- 1 in 10 have a mental health challenge that significantly affects how they function at home, school and in the community.
- During the pandemic the number of youth with anxiety and depression more than doubled.
- Roughly 75-80% of kids who are in need of mental health services do not receive them.
- Suicide was the 2nd leading cause of death for children/youth age 10-14 and 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death for individuals aged 15-24 in 2020.
- Mental Health is the #1 concern identified by youth 15-19 and roughly 80% said it can feel uncomfortable to ask for help.
- 71% of parents reported their child's mental health deteriorated in the past two years, and 64% report that they expect that this will affect their child's long-term development.
- Less than 1/2 of children and youth who need treatment get it and 96% of young adults with substance use issues are unable to access the help they need.



Needs keep rising...

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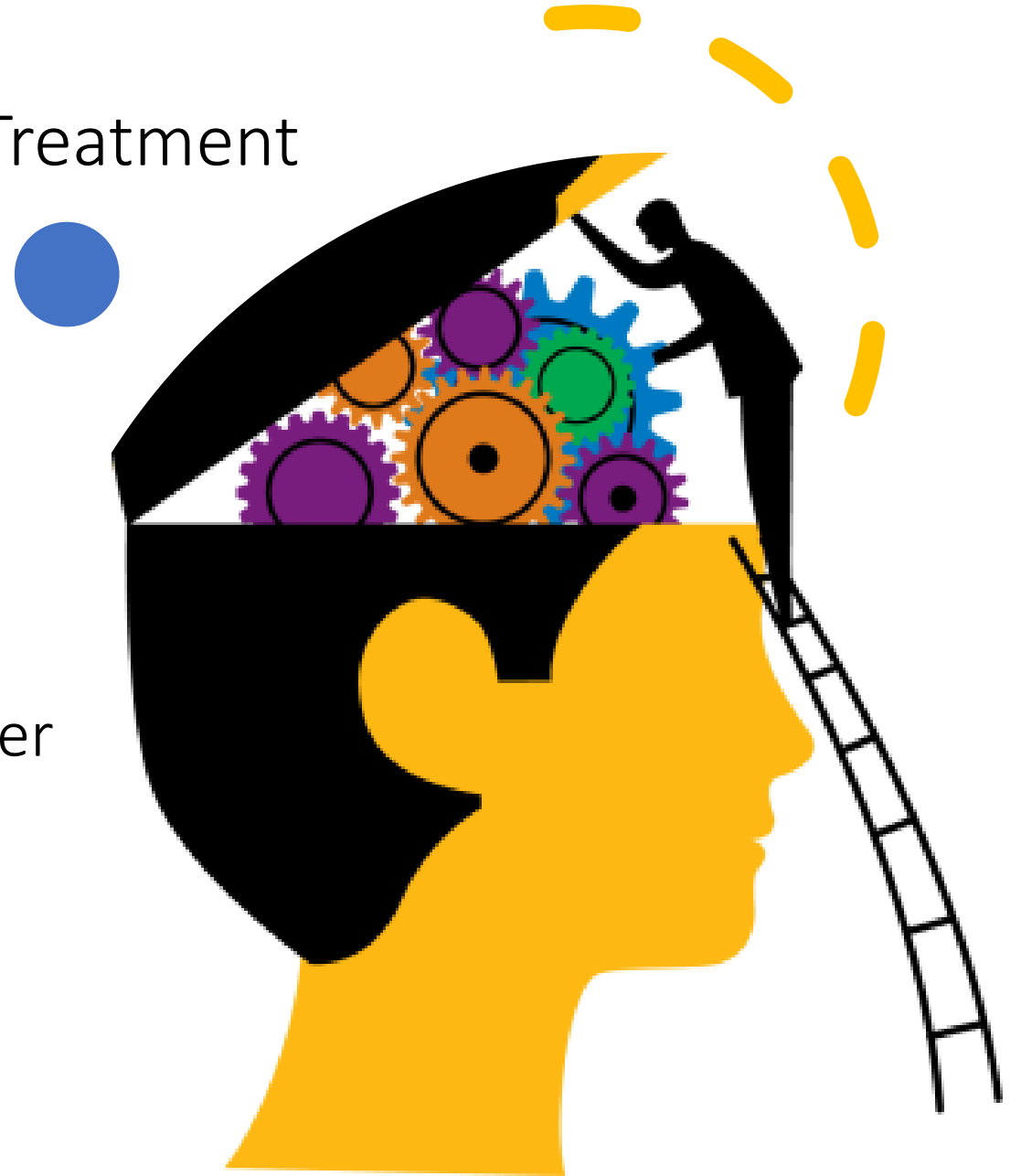
But access to treatment or capacity  
to help all those who need it  
has not...

Leaving countless children and youth  
without the help they need.



# Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services/Supports/Treatment

- Lack of **Information**, Faith in system
- Lack of **Resources**, Support, Training
- Stigma, Bias, Misconceptions and other 'people based' barriers.
- Challenges of an 'Invisible Disability'





Kids often don't ask for help and/or are unsure how or who to go to when they are struggling and sometimes their need for help comes out through behaviors which are often misunderstood.

In addition, those in the position to help often do not due to a variety of issues.



Systematic Barriers

## #1 Lack of Capacity

Across settings, time  
and systems....



A photograph of a classroom scene. On the left, a male teacher in a white shirt is pointing towards a green chalkboard. On the right, a young boy in a striped shirt and blue jeans is standing with his back to the camera, reaching up to touch the wall. In the foreground, the backs of several students' heads are visible as they sit at their desks. A large white circular overlay is positioned on the left side of the image, containing text.

## Supporting Mental Health Not Only Matters

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### **But time is of the essence...**

Wait times between diagnosis and connection to services and supports is often incredibly long.

When students cannot access the services and supports they need to successfully manage their mental health needs they may multiply, become more difficult to manage and often affect how children and youth view themselves and how they are viewed and treated by others.

# Mental Health is...

- A person's sense of social, emotional and psychological well-being which affects the way they feel, think and act.
- Important at all stages of life but plays a key role in shaping a child's emotional, social and cognitive development as well as their ability to learn and be successful at school and in life.
- A state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community which for kids is school.

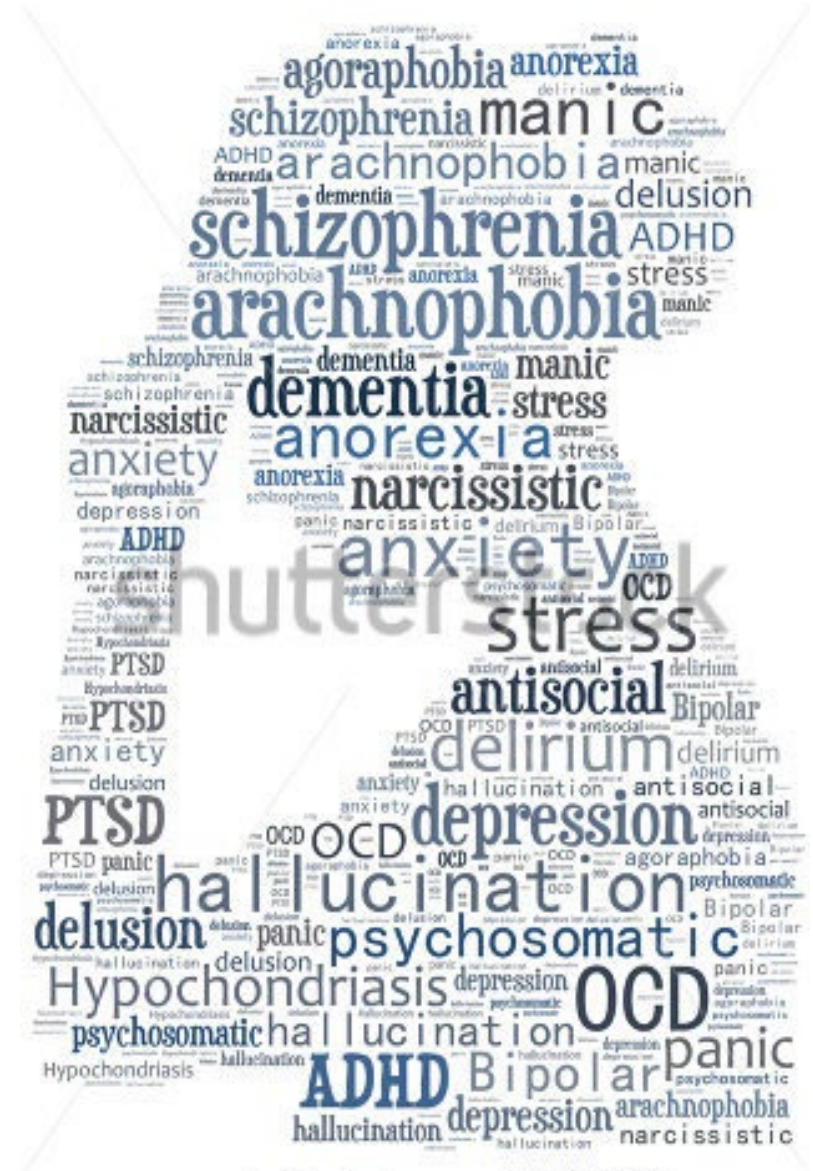


WHO



# Common Mental Health Diagnosis in Children and Youth

How symptoms and related challenges and behaviors might affect success at school.





Mental health challenges can affect a student's ability to..

- Learn
- Focus
- Engage

They may also interfere with other important components of classroom learning such as social interaction & behavior which are critical to student success.

Individual students are affected in a variety of ways regardless of their diagnosis.

# Other Obstacles, Challenges and Barriers

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- Mental health challenges can also affect a student's confidence and ability to engage in classroom activities.
- Many kids struggle with basic classroom expectations such as ability to sit still, stay focused and be attentive.
- What comes naturally for most kids can be difficult for kids with mental health challenges which can lead to ongoing frustration in kids who may already have difficulty coping with problems and managing everyday stressors.
- Difficulties regulating behavior or emotions can also affect classroom engagement, learning and relationships with peers and teachers which can lead to further isolation, loneliness, and a lack of friends.
- Common mental health symptoms such as excessive fears or worries, prolonged negative mood or feelings of sadness or hopelessness can make it difficult to focus on anything else - including instruction. These symptoms can also affect a student's confidence, courage and willingness to engage in activities and/or share what they know.
- School success also requires self motivation and control, as well as organization, persistence, and other executive functioning skills and these are the very skills many kids with mental health challenges struggle with.
- Kids with behavioral challenges are often removed from the classroom taking away the ability to learn and benefit from classroom instruction and activities.



What you see...



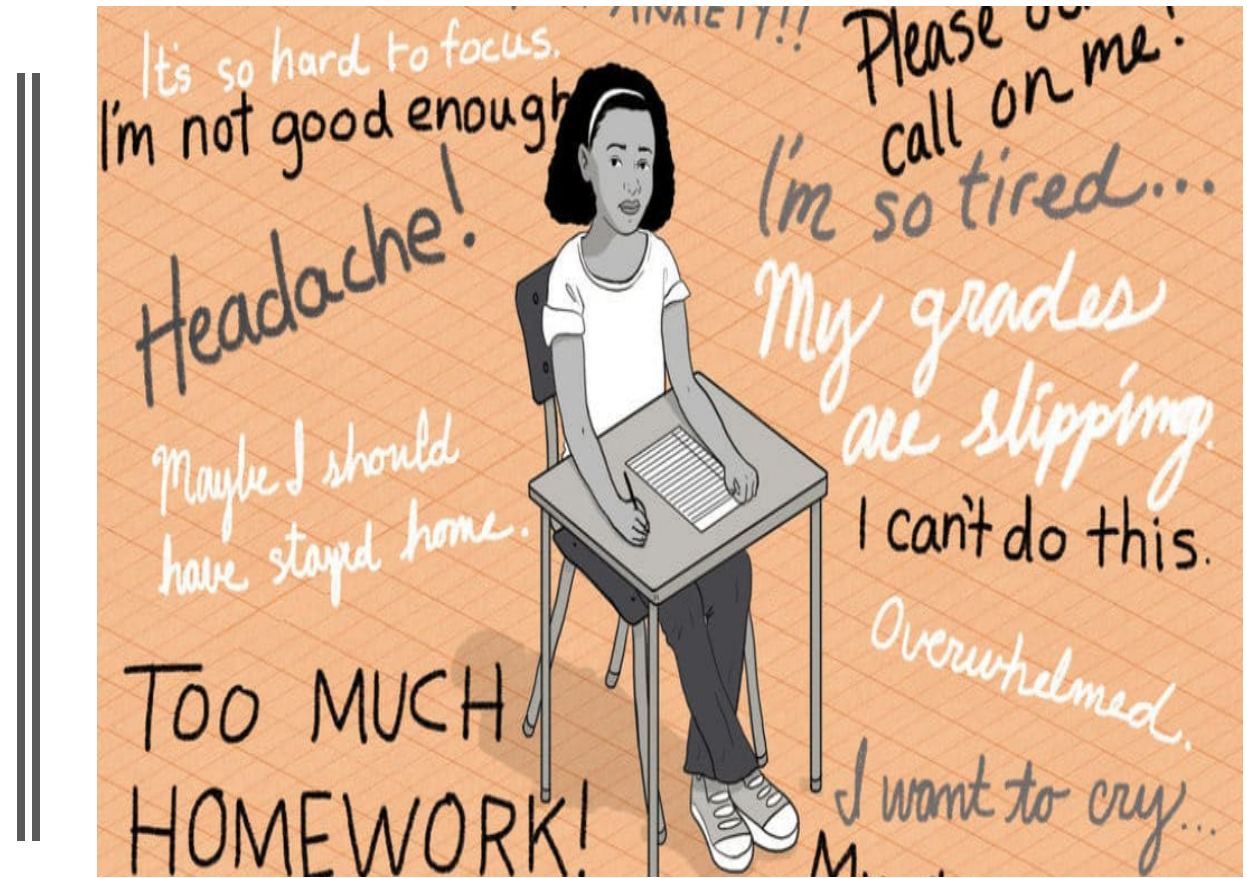
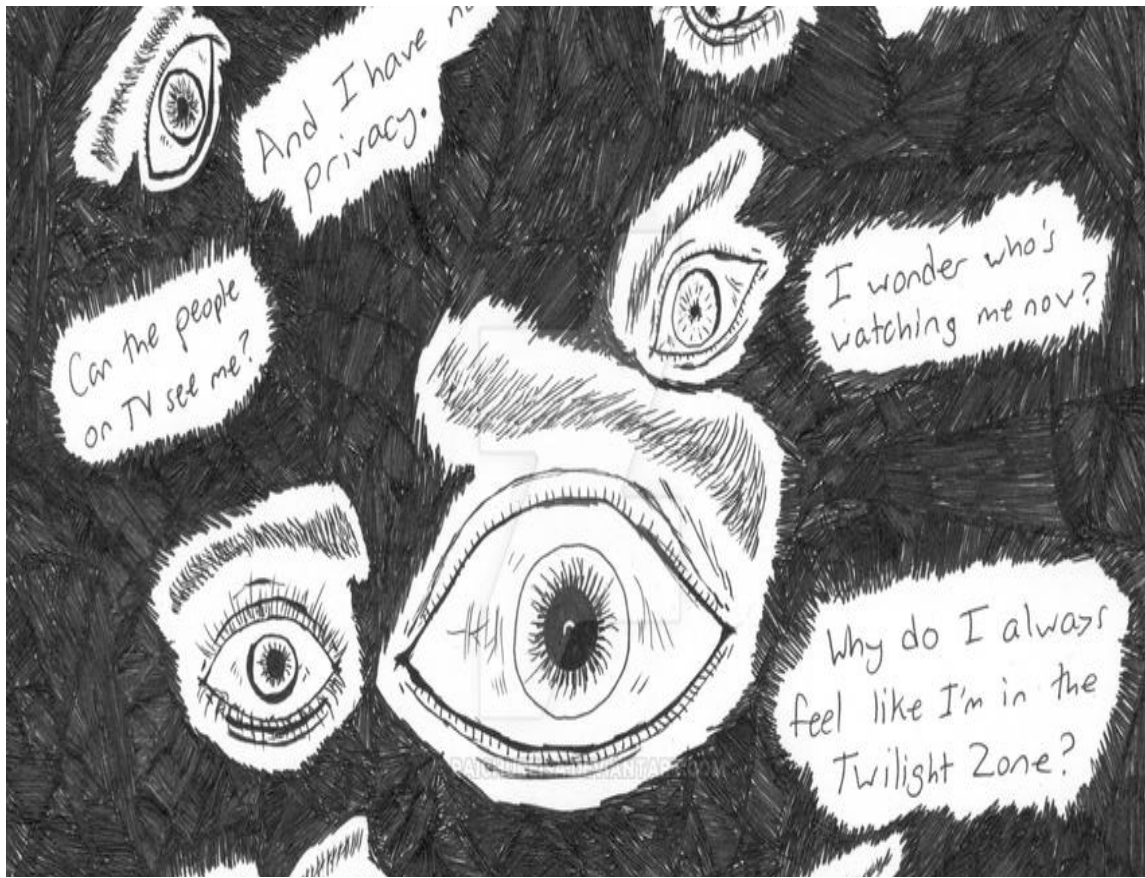
What we often don't see...





# Or Hear....

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And sometimes all people see is....  
The 'B' Word

# *BEHAVIOR* *Is Communication*

*What we see is not always  
what we assume....*

Misunderstood or mishandled behavioral issues are common and often create additional challenges for kids.





# Keys to Success When Dealing With Behavior

## Things to remember and consider:

- **Behavior is Communication** – So identifying what it is saying is key!
- Positive behavior interventions and supports are proven effective.
- Disciplinary Approaches on the other hand:
  - Are not effective in eliminating negative behavior.
  - Often leave kids feeling isolated and labeled
  - Fail to equip students with the strategies, skills or replacement behaviors needed to interact appropriately at school.
  - Often involve time out of the classroom leading to a lack of access to instruction and other negative outcomes. In fact, kids who are regularly excluded are more likely perform poorly, have negative attitudes about school and themselves and even drop out.

What you  
might see...

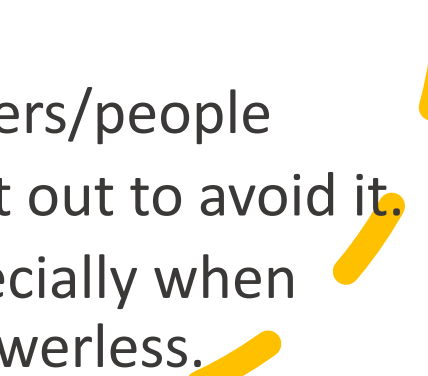
## Youth With Anxiety and Depression

Kids who struggle with anxiety or depression often struggle to manage moods or thoughts, have fluctuating energy, difficulty staying motivated and can become overwhelmed.

What you might see:

- Irritability
- Difficulty staying focused, making decisions and getting started
- Fear of new activities
- Reluctance or refusal to participate
- Frequent absences or physical complaints

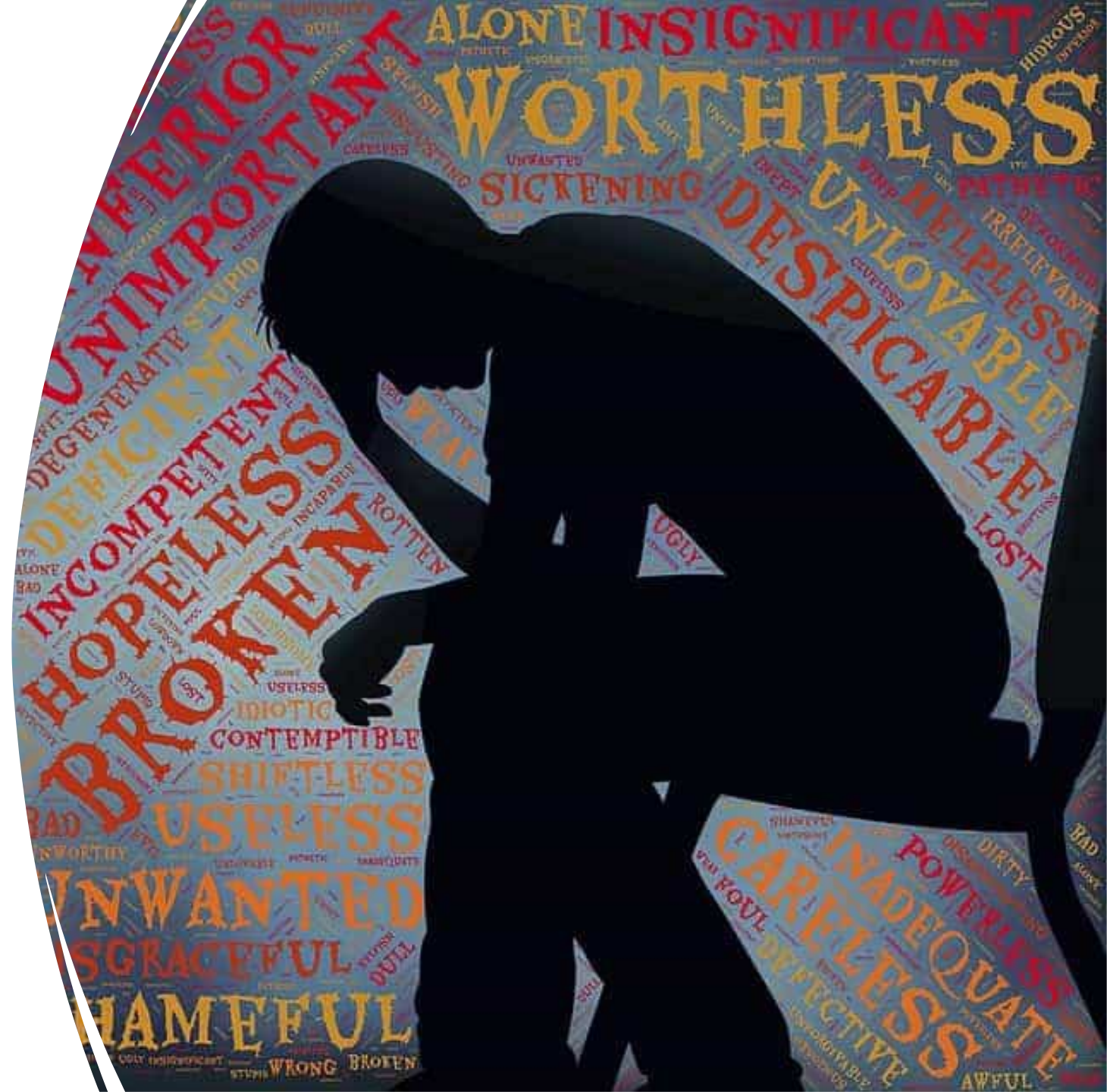
They may also:

- Seek excessive reassurance
  - Avoid school activities, work and peers/people
  - Refuse to participate in school or act out to avoid it.
  - Get stuck on negative thoughts especially when feeling overwhelmed, anxious or powerless.
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# Negative Thinking Traps

- All of Nothing Thinking
- Emotional Reasoning
- Overgeneralization
- Minimization
- Personalization
- Fortune Telling
- Mind Reading

## How to help....



# Tips for Kids With Anxiety

## What is helpful?

- Talking about their fears and listening trying not to diminish their concerns.
- Letting them know you are there for them and can and want to help.
- Help them to plan coping strategies and develop/practice skills they can use.
- Encourage and recognize *brave* behavior by helping them to:
  - ‘Ride the Wave ’
  - Examine the evidence about their fears – Talk about the difference between
    - ‘What Ifs’ and ‘What Is’ and help them learn strategies to do that on their own
  - Approach and manage fears by creating exposure steps that build from where they are.

## What isn't helpful?

- Accommodations that ‘accommodate’ anxiety or avoidance
- Extra time or ignoring issues often just feeds anxiety or gives it additional time to build up
- Journaling & Relaxation techniques are valuable/enjoyable but are not proven tools to reduce anxiety.



# Tips for Supporting Kids With Depression

- Create an environment where kids feel comfortable talking about their feelings.
- Listen without judgment or trying to fix the problem.
- Help them keep a sense of perspective and find some silver linings if you can.
- If your child is stuck in an ongoing circle of negative thoughts and/or focusing on worst case scenarios – It may be necessary to start to challenge their thinking a bit.
- Try **‘What If versus What Is’**
- Remind kids of challenges they’ve overcome in the past.
- Help them to create coping strategies to help manage uncertainty, negative feelings.
- Help them to sort through the things they can and cannot control.
- Support them to use coping strategies for the things they cannot control and develop strategies to help them to adapt to day-to-day challenges.

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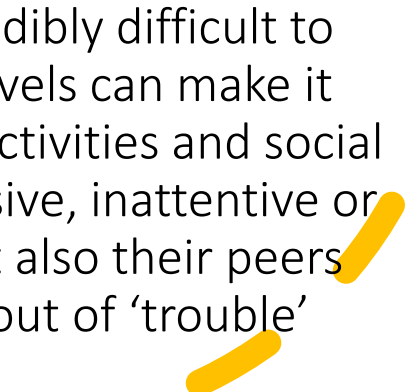
What you  
might see...

## Children and Youth With ADHD

Students with ADHD are often disorganized, forgetful and are easily distracted or bored. They may make careless mistakes, overlook details, get easily sidetracked and seem not to be listening.

Youth with ADHD may also have trouble paying attention and organizing tasks or possessions. They may struggle to follow directions, finish work and may resist tasks that require sustained attention such as homework or big projects. Depending on the type, kids with ADHD may also be hyperactive and appear extremely talkative, impatient, impulsive and restless. Many struggle to sit still, think before they act or control their behavior leading them to blurt out answers, over-react, interrupt or intrude on other's conversations and space. Young children with ADHD often struggle to play quietly, wait their turn, share or keep their hands to themselves.

Educational Implications: Difficulty with attention, organization and ability to complete or turn in work can make it incredibly difficult to succeed at school. High energy and low attention levels can make it difficult for students to be successful in classroom activities and social situations. Sometimes their overly energetic, impulsive, inattentive or aggressive behaviors not only frustrate teachers but also their peers making it challenging to make or keep friends, stay out of 'trouble' and even remain in the classroom.

Several thick, yellow, hand-drawn style brush strokes in the bottom right corner of the slide.



What you may see...

Students with  
Bi-Polar  
or other  
Mood Disorders

Fluctuating mood, energy levels, feelings, behavior and motivation can make learning & social interactions difficult. Students may have difficulty concentrating, remembering assignments or directions and may sometimes experience challenges understanding and processing instruction.

Moods can alternate between extremely low (depressive) periods when they may have low energy, feel worthless and be overly sensitive, unmotivated and even suicidal; To high (manic) moods where they experience increases in energy, confidence and risk-taking behaviors.

Youth may also have episodes of overwhelming emotion, extreme restlessness, impulsivity, irritability and disrupted sleep. As well as, explosive behaviors, impaired judgment, racing thoughts, daredevil behavior, suspicious or grandiose thoughts and even delusions and hallucinations.

Educational Implications: The unpredictable and/or intense nature of the moods and behaviors they experience make it difficult to focus on or benefit from instruction and can also negatively affect their ability to connect with peers and adults, engage in activities and develop or keep friendships.

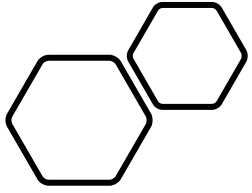
# What Helps?

Depends on the needs of individual students.

Both formal and informal supports are important and tailoring to individual needs of youth is key!







# Formal Supports



# Accommodations and Modifications

- Academic
- Environmental
- Organizational
- Social-Emotional...
- Positive Behavior Supports





# Social Emotional Accommodations/Supports

- Help students to develop strategies to help them recognize their triggers, symptoms or challenges and then teach coping skills, strategies and appropriate alternative behaviors and skills if needed.
- Create a safety or crisis plan. Involve student in planning and teach coping and de-escalation skills.
- Challenge student's negative thoughts/perceptions and help them recognize their progress/successes.
- Be predictable and consistent - yet flexible, available and approachable.
- Teach and reinforce social skills. Share hands on tools and strategies students can use to help manage anxiety or challenging tasks such as joining a group, initiate a conversation, calming themselves, etc..
- Provide opportunities to prepare, practice & build on successes and/or navigate possible set-backs.
- Respect student's anxious feelings and thoughts but try not to empower or enable them.
- Try to keep 'anticipatory periods' short and prepare all kids for transitions or unexpected changes.
- Express positive but realistic expectations- Show confidence in their ability to cope or solve problems.
- Help kids think things through... What if their fear came true? How would they handle it?
- Provide skill building activities, direct support and practice for all students during regular instruction.
- Talk about mental health, stress management and the consequences of negative thought or behavior patterns. Talk, teach and model positive statements and responses.

# Behavior Goals and Planning

Behavior is Communication so beginning the process with a Functional Behavior Assessment and accompanying recommendations is essential in positive behavior support planning.

Positive behavior support plans should teach/reinforce new skills & not be negative or punitive.

Good behavioral goals:

- Build on student's strengths
- Teach new skills and include instruction
- Allow for practice
- Are measurable and useful for student's success and acceptance by peers
- Are updated regularly

Other tips for success:

- Address behavior issues one on one, i.e. Use non-verbal signals when students need to cool down, try a strategy or technique, get back on track, take a break, reign it in, etc...
- Monitor student's comfort/frustration levels with plan, adjust steps/strategies as necessary.
- Zone in on 1 or 2 things where kids can experience success and build from there.



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# Important things to consider when creating student support and accommodations



Does the student think the support or intervention will be helpful?



Do they have what they need in order to effectively access or utilize the proposed support? i.e. skills, equipment or materials, people.



Can the support or modification be implemented in a way that does not single out the student or make them stand out as different? Can social skills instruction/practice be done with the entire class?



Will the teacher and/or school be able to implement the support consistently and well? Do they have the capacity, information and skills they need also? If not what support, training, etc. is needed?



Resist doing too much at once! Try to keep it simple and focus on the most pressing needs to start. Implementing every intervention at once makes it very difficult to know what is effective or working.



## Keys to Success

### **Feeling Connected and Cared About!**

Engaging youth in the process.

Asking what they need.

**Youth Voice is the #1 predictor of success for school-based initiatives and school wide support efforts.**

Youth involvement is also key when planning and implementing effective IEP's, accommodations or other supports and services.

# WHAT YOUTH SAY . . . .

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## HELPS:

- Listening Without Judgment! Validation is key...
- Being real, genuinely interested, empathetic & willing to listen with an open mind and heart
- Being knowledgeable about mental health issues and other challenges youth face
- Being passionate about youth and their issues and willing to provide assistance, support/connections
- Realizing that school is not the *end all- be all* for all students - be there for them anyway
- Treating all students the same regardless of issues

## **Educated staff who are knowledgeable about:**

- How to recognize mental health issues/symptoms
- What to do in situations when students are in crisis
- How to best approach and assist struggling youth
- How to keep appropriate boundaries while supporting
- Coping strategies or supports that can help students

## HURTS:

- Blanket, inauthentic statements
- Lack of passion about students, their needs, or concerns
- Calling students out publicly
- Pushing students beyond their abilities or comfort zone.
- Misplaced disciplinary action
- Judging, dismissing or down playing a student's situation struggles or feelings
- Ignoring slackers- seek to involve them
- Assuming just because your grades are good everything is ok
- Assuming if grades are bad it is due to lack of trying or caring
- Not sharing information that affects them with them



# Share information, tips and coping strategies with youth!

Tell them how their mental health may affect their ability to...

- Screen out stimuli i.e. sights, sounds and smells or intrusive thoughts
- Deal with changes or transitions
- Communicate effectively or make or keep relationships
- Concentrate and ability to focus on tasks, listening or reading
- Handle time pressures, multiple tasks or testing situations
- Successfully interact with others, read social cues, fit in and contribute to class discussions, group work or other school activities
- Have enough energy to attend or participate in class or after school activities due to fluctuations in mood or energy levels, medication etc..
- Approach others, participate in groups in/out of class, make friends..
- Respond to change- new demands, tasks and feedback from others
- Manage school related sources of stress and anxiety including expectations, testing or challenges with peers or other social issues.

Then help them to develop strategies to help manage these and other challenges they may encounter and then build upon those ...



How Can  
Parent's Help

# How Can Teachers Help?

- Be knowledgeable about children's mental health and school and community resources available to support their mental health needs.
- Provide structure & consistency in the classroom.
- Create an open welcoming environment where mental health is talked about.
- Plan for transitions and assure students are aware of them.
- Be available and supportive. Help students to recognize their strengths, develop skills/interests.
- Make plan for when students may need additional support.
- Communicate with counselors, social workers and families about students. Involve parents and partner with others who can help such as school counselors/social workers, CMH, etc...



# How can school communities as a whole help?

- Ensure all staff are aware of mental health issues, supports and resources.
- Promote a sense of belonging and find a way to bring all kids in.
- Help kids to develop competencies and resiliency by helping them to use their thoughts and actions to overcome challenges so they know it's possible and they are capable.
- Be aware of environmental factors or situations that may trigger or aggravate mental symptoms.
- Recognize that behavior isn't always a 'choice' or 'will-full disobedience'.
- Teach and reinforce positive behavior and thoughtful decision making.
- Set clear expectations and boundaries and try to steer clear of negative disciplinary responses.
- Ensure access to school based mental health supports and connect to services when needed.
- Provide a safe place or person for youth to check in with if they are struggling or need support.
- Establish a crisis response team and procedures.
- Ensure all school staff have the skills and knowledge they need to support all students.
- Welcome the expertise of families, mental health professionals and community partners.





What else works?



# School Based Health Centers



- Schools are in a unique position to provide support and a natural setting for providing comprehensive prevention and early intervention services for all kids as most spend much of their days there.
- 1 in 5 students suffers from a mental health disorder but roughly 75-80% in need of mental health services do not receive them. The majority of those who do receive mental health services receive them in school where they are more likely to seek them out.
- Research shows that students are more likely to seek counseling when it is available at school.
- Youth are 6 times more likely to complete Evidence Based Treatments in schools than community settings
- Currently in Michigan there are more than 100 school based and school linked child and adolescent health centers that offer a variety of physical and mental health services. A recent budget proposal would add 40 more sites serving an additional 20,000 students.




## Access to School Based Mental Health Services and Supports

Improves:

- Physical and psychological safety – A major key to success!
- Academic Performance
- Social and emotional competence

Reduces negative outcomes such as:

- Disciplinary referrals
  - Dropout
  - Substance abuse
  - Involvement in criminal justice system
- 



Promising  
School Based  
Mental Health  
Projects,  
Programs or  
Initiatives  
in Michigan

Project Aware

Trails Program

Social Emotional Learning/Children's Mental  
Health Network

Behavioral Health Learning Community (BHLC)

BH Works for MI schools

Others.....

# Other New Funding Efforts or Opportunities

The **Governors 2023 budget proposal** included \$361 million to expand programs to support children's mental health including funding for mental health screenings, mental health professionals in schools, school based mental and physical health efforts, school- based health clinics and expansion of the Trails Program.

**National Governors Association Grant** to seek out student voice in the creation of social emotional learning efforts.

**MI Health Endowment Fund Grant** to create a community of practice and fund 19 districts to infuse Social Emotional Competencies

**Loan assistance** to attract and retain behavioral health professionals and a day treatment program for kids in Child Welfare system struggling in school/home.

**MSU Extension** \$1.55 Million from the Office of Justice Programs to support student mental health and STOP school violence. Funding will will help MSU to provide school communities with training, counter effects of the youth mental health crisis and prevent or reduce instances of bullying.

Other statewide efforts include the recent reorganization of behavioral services at the state level including the development of the **Bureau of Children's Coordinated Health Policy and Supports** and other efforts to expand access to quality home-based, community and crisis services for children, youth and families across Michigan.



# Supporting Your Child's Mental Health

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## Tips for Families

It's often hard to know what to do or where to go when your child is struggling.

When deciding if your child needs help for their mental health, consider:

- Is it affecting their ability to function, at home, school and community?
- Intensity, Frequency or Duration of your child's struggles.
- Most importantly remember that you are an expert about your child! If you are concerned that your child may have a mental health condition that is making it difficult for them to learn or be successful at home or school help is out there.

You can start by reaching out for help by:

Talking with your pediatrician about your concerns, asking your family doctor for a referral to a mental health specialist or by contacting your local Community Mental Health.

You can also contact your child's teacher, school social worker or principal to ask for an assessment. Inquire if they are seeing any similar issues at school and ask how you might work together to support your child. Be open, direct and specific. Ask what services or supports may be available and any other questions you may have.

Contact ACMH if you need assistance connecting to services and supports.

To learn more visit the ACMH website at [www.acmh-mi.org](http://www.acmh-mi.org)





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# Questions? Or Need Additional Assistance



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# Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

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