MHTTC Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
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NCSMH NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH

Supporting Student Mental Health: Resources to Prepare Educators

Background

Educators and school personnel play a vital role in promoting mental health and well-being and identifying and responding to emerging mental illness in children and adolescents. However, they often have not received the education, training, and/or ongoing support needed to respond in the classroom. The MHTTC Network and the National Center for School Mental Health collaborated on an environmental scan and needs assessment of available educator mental health literacy training and resources. This document describes the role of educators in supporting student mental health, explains the core components of mental health literacy, and provides an annotated list of existing resources and trainings that instruct educators on mental health literacy.

Student Mental Health Facts

Committed relationships with supportive adults can act as a protective factor for children (NSCDC, 2015)	1 in 5 U.S. children meet criteria for a diagnosable mental health disorder (Child Mind Institute, 2015)	Students who participate in social emotional learning programs improve academic performance by 11–17 percentile points (Durlak et al., 2011)	50% of mental disorders begin before age 14, 70% before age 18 (WHO, 2019)
Students with good emotion regulation skills perform better in school and are at less risk of mental health symptoms (Project CoVitality, 2020)	The average delay between onset of mental illness symptoms and treatment is 11 years (NAMI, 2019)	17.2% of students nationwide reported seriously considering attempting suicide (CDC, 2017)	Early identification and intervention of mental health concerns can vastly improve school and life outcomes for students (Mental Health America, 2016)

Educators and Student Mental Health

Increasingly, educators recognize the opportunities to promote student well-being and to identify and address mental health concerns experienced by their students. When positive mental health skills are promoted and mental health concerns are addressed, student learning at the individual and classroom level increases. Below are examples of roles that educators can take related to student mental health:

Educator Roles in Supporting Student Mental Health

(Andrews, McCabe, & Wideman-Johnston, 2014; Ekornes, 2017; Froese-Germain & Riel, 2012; Graham et al., 2011; Kidger et al., 2010; Knightsmith et al., 2013; Koller & Bertel, 2006; Phillippo & Kelly, 2014; Reinke et al., 2011; Rothi et al., 2008)

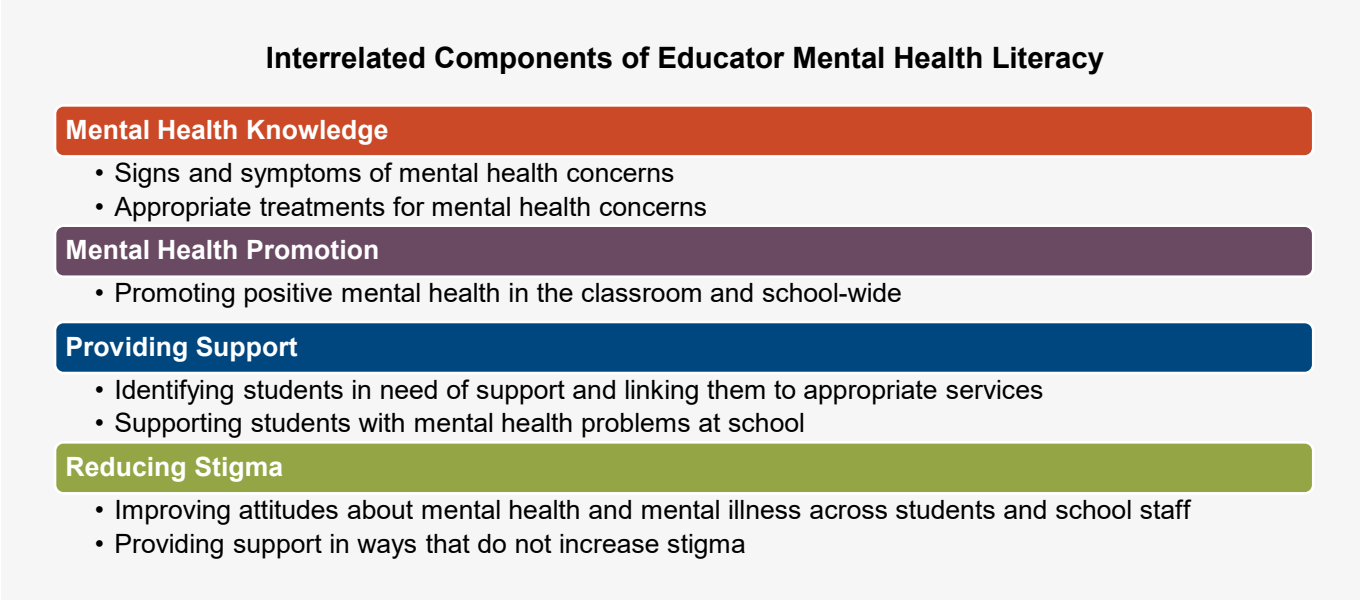
While educators across the country are actively involved in supporting student mental health, they often have not been trained to do so, and may feel hesitant or not well supported, which can contribute to stress and burnout. Educators report the following challenges and professional needs related to supporting student mental health:

Challenges Faced by Educators in Supporting Student Mental Health	Mental Health Professional Development Needs Identified by Educators
X Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities when supporting student mental health	✓ Recognizing mental health problems
X Lack of time to collaborate with mental health professionals	✓ Providing classroom supports for students with mental health problems
X Lack of understanding of confidentiality limits when communicating with mental health professionals	✓ Understanding school procedures and resources related to student mental health
X Lack of relevant knowledge and training during pre-service education and professional development	✓ Making appropriate community referrals
	✓ Implementing classroom interventions to promote positive mental health

(Ekornes, 2017; Knightsmith et al., 2013; Koller & Bertel, 2006; Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015; Phillippo & Kelly, 2014; Rothi et al., 2008)

Environmental Scan on Educator Mental Health Literacy

Mental health literacy is defined as the knowledge and beliefs about obtaining and maintaining positive mental health, reducing stigma related to mental illness, increasing help-seeking efficacy, and understanding mental health concerns and how to address them (Jorm, 2012; Kutcher et al., 2016). Several trainings and resources have been developed to increase educator mental health literacy, including online courses, websites, and workshops. Mental health literacy resources and professional development for educators may target one or more of the following interrelated components:



Given the critical need to equip educators to support student mental health in schools, we conducted an environmental scan with educators, state education and mental health staff, and national school mental health experts to identify existing resources and trainings focused on mental health literacy for educators.

Each resource was assessed for cost, modality (online or in-person; length), target student grade level, availability of continuing education credits, and breadth of mental health literacy components covered.

Most of the resources and trainings identified were aimed at promoting positive mental health and increasing mental health knowledge. Trainings to support students with mental health concerns and reduce stigma were less frequent, with almost no resources specifically designed to address mental health through a cultural lens. We also identified practical barriers to accessing resources, as many are costly and few offer continuing education credit.

Based on our review, the accompanying table summarizes only those resources that are currently available to educators to increase mental health literacy and are low-cost or no-cost; half provide continuing education credits.

Summary and Next Steps

Educators, parents, and mental health professionals are concerned about the mental health and well-being of children and youth. Increasingly, schools are recognized as a critical venue for identifying and providing supports for students suffering from stress and trauma, and those with the most challenging emotional and behavioral problems. Teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel can assist their students by establishing compassionate schools, providing an array of supports, and collaborating with mental health professionals.

Moving from training to implementing new practices requires change at the personnel, school, and district levels that may include policy and procedure shifts. As you or your school/district move toward implementing practices to support student mental health, consider the following:

- How can programs be implemented in a way that addresses the needs of schools as well as community needs and concerns?
- What outside assistance might you need to guide the implementation process?
- Who in your school/district can help spearhead implementation?

- Which local mental health providers or agency staff can assist with implementation?
- How are you involving parents, families, and students in the process of designing programs and monitoring progress?
- What resources, including funding, are available to facilitate your plan?

Intentionality and inclusiveness can go a long way to help students feel welcome. Establishing trust and positive relationships with students cultivates a sense of safety and well-being. Even as we realize that some students will need more intensive supports, it is critical to know that a compassionate school culture is foundational.

Per SAMHSA's request and to fill gaps identified in the current review, in Spring 2020, the MHTTC Network, in partnership with the National Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, will release a free, practical, and engaging online course and website focused on educator mental health literacy. This course is being informed by and co-developed with educators from across the nation. These resources will present concrete, universal approaches to promoting student mental health and creating safe and supportive classroom environments, describe student behaviors that may indicate a mental health concern, and provide specific skills and strategies to engage and support students with mental health concerns.

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Mental Health Literacy Resources

Icon Key

Cost	Modality (length)	Target Grade Level	CEUs Available	Mental Health Literacy Components	
Free	In-person	Elementary	Yes	Knowledge	Promotion
		K-5th			
Cost associated	Online	Secondary	No	Stigma	Support
		6th-12th			

Program Name	Description	Cost	Modality (length)	Target Grade Level	CEUs Available	Mental Health Literacy Components
At-Risk for Educators	Role-play simulations developed for elementary, middle, and high school educators that aim to increase knowledge about children's mental health. The platform is customizable to include a local list of mental health resources. Research suggests significant increases in teacher mental health skills and the number of students that educators connect with following training with *At-Risk for Educators*. (https://kognito.com/products/at-risk-for-elementary-schools)	Varies	1 hour	**K-12th**		
Classroom Mental Health	A website that aims to be a guide for teachers starting from when they notice mental health concerns or are approached by a student for support. The site addresses common concerns (e.g., Can I help? Should I help?), and provides resources for improving classroom atmosphere and exercises for teachers. (https://classroommentalhealth.org)		Varies	**K-12th**		
Community-Partnered School Behavioral Health Modules	Webinar modules that provide a range of strategies, resources, and tools for behavioral health clinicians, educators, and student support staff. The modules focus on supporting student social, emotional, behavioral, and academic progress through a community-partnered approach to school behavioral health. (https://mdbehavioralhealth.com/training)		Varies	**K-12th**		

Emotional Health at School	An interactive online course developed to help educators in the UK recognize and respond to signs of mental health challenges, understand professional responsibilities, and support their own mental health. The course includes case studies, role plays, and dialogues. (https://www.familylinks.org.uk/emotional-health-at-school/elearning)	$ ~$35	1 hour	**6th-12th**	✗	
Mental Health 101	A webinar that provides a broad overview of mental health signs and symptoms, including for common mental health disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety), with the goal of providing educators with skills to identify students in need of support. (https://childmind.org/our-impact/school-and-community/student-success-webinar-program)	$ ~$50	Varies	**K-12th**	✓	
Mental Health to Support Student Learning	These modules are intended to advance basic mental health proficiency for educators and other school support professionals. The modules include content on student development and mental health, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, strategies for promoting mental health, data-based decision making, cultural competency, and collaboration. (https://mdbehavioralhealth.com/training)	FREE	Varies	**K-12th**	✗	
Mental Health Training for Teachers	A recorded training that introduces educators to common behavioral health concerns faced by students in the classroom. The presentation is divided into 26 segments (approximately 10 minutes each) on topics ranging from the signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety to transition to the classroom after hospitalization. (https://www.unmc.edu/bhecn/education/online-training/teacher-training.html)	FREE	5 hours	**K-12th**	✗	
NAMI Ending the Silence	A presentation for school staff designed to be conducted by both a leader and a young adult with a mental health condition who details their experience. The presentation includes information about signs and symptoms, approaching students, and working with families while also allowing time for questions and dialogue. (https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-Ending-the-Silence)	FREE	1 hour	**K-12th**	✗	
NextMark Foundation	A self-paced online training for teachers with modules on mental health topics including anxiety, ODD, ADHD, and mood disorders. Each module includes an explanation of the mental health disorder manifesting in the classroom, a strategies section, and case studies, required quizzes, Educators Check-in, and a Teacher Toolbox cheat sheet. (https://training.nextmarkfoundation.org)	$ Varies	Varies	**K-12th**	✓	
Red Flags National	Red Flags National uses a variety of materials, including toolkits and videos, for both students and teachers to help educational communities understand mental health. Specifically, Red Flag aims for teachers and students to understand what mental health challenges look like and what to do about them with the goal of seeing mental health as a component of overall health. (https://www.redflags.org/trainings)	$ $300+	Varies	**K-12th**	✗	

School Mental Health Resource and Training Center	A website developed by the Mental Health Association in New York State aimed at providing schools with mental health resources and curriculum, including a broad online training geared toward all members of the community that provides an overview of mental health with the aim of reducing stigma and increasing knowledge. (www.mentalhealthednys.org)	FREE	Varies	**K-12th**	✓	
Supporting Educator Mental Health Literacy Tutorial Series	A series of four self-paced tutorials: Creating and Sustaining Mentally Healthy Classrooms, Recognizing and Responding to Anxiety Problems in the Classroom, Recognizing and Responding to Mood Problems in the Classroom, and Recognizing and Responding to Attention, Hyperactivity and/or Impulsivity Problems. Each tutorial is accompanied by an information sheet that teachers can keep as easy reference for the topics covered in the presentation. (https://smh-assist.ca/online-learning)	FREE	2 hours	**K-12th**	✗	
Youth Mental Health	A course designed by the University of North Dakota for educators to meet state mental health education requirements. Participants can enroll anytime and take up to four months to complete the course, which is focused on the prevalence, signs, and symptoms of youth mental health challenges. (https://und.edu/academics/development/educators/youth-mental-health/index.html)	$ $199	15 hours	**K-12th**	✓	
Youth Mental Health First Aid	An in-person course designed to teach non-mental health professionals, including educators and school staff, how to help adolescents in challenging mental health situations. After providing an overview of typical adolescent development, the course covers common mental health issues faced by teenagers and also introduces a 5-step action plan for crisis situations. Data suggests that Mental Health First Aid increases the ability to recognize signs and symptoms of a mental health challenge or substance misuse and increases the likelihood that participants will connect distressed youth to appropriate resources. (https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org)	$ Varies	1 day	**6th-12th**	✓	

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