

FOSTERING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICES IN SCHOOL

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Mental health is a vital aspect of overall wellbeing, and it greatly influences an individual's development, relationships, and success in life. In the context of education, schools play an important role in supporting students' mental health because they are where young people spend much of their time. For this reason, fostering mental health support services in schools should not be seen as an optional initiative but rather as a fundamental responsibility of educational systems. When schools prioritize mental health, they create environments where students can learn effectively, build resilience, and grow into healthy individuals.

The teenage years are often considered the most vulnerable stage in a person's life. Adolescents experience significant changes in their physical, emotional, and social development that can affect their mental wellbeing. During this time, many young people face pressures such as academic demands, family challenges, peer relationships, and exposure to social media. Without proper guidance and support, these factors can lead to mental health problems like anxiety, depression, or even self-harm. Because of this, schools serve as an ideal setting for early identification and intervention. Teachers and staff, who interact with students daily, are often in the best position to notice early warning signs and connect students with the right support before issues escalate.

One effective way to strengthen mental health support in schools is by implementing mental health education and awareness programs. These initiatives teach students how to take care of their mental wellbeing, recognize symptoms of distress, and seek help when needed. Lessons could focus on healthy coping mechanisms, stress

management, and the importance of talking about emotions. By normalizing discussions around mental health, schools can empower students to be proactive about their wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of problems worsening over time. Education in this area also helps students become more compassionate toward their peers, fostering a culture of understanding and support.

Another crucial step is ensuring that schools have trained professionals available to provide direct support. Having a resident school psychologist, counselor, or mental health worker can make a significant difference. These professionals are equipped to handle serious conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, or behavioral challenges. They can provide one-on-one counseling, group sessions, or therapies such as cognitive-behavioral approaches tailored to the student's needs. More importantly, they can collaborate with teachers and parents to create a consistent support system, addressing not just academic performance but also emotional and social development. Easy access to such services within the school environment removes barriers for students who might otherwise feel uncomfortable seeking external help.

Schools also need to actively work on reducing the stigma surrounding mental health. Too often, students avoid seeking help because they fear being judged or labeled. By integrating support services into the school community, students are more likely to view them as normal and accessible. Awareness campaigns, peer support groups, and open discussions led by teachers or counselors can gradually change attitudes and make students feel more at ease when asking for help. When support becomes part of everyday school life, students no longer see it as something that singles them out but rather as an essential part of personal growth.

In addition, embedding mental health education into the school curriculum can create a lasting impact. Subjects such as self-care, resilience, mindfulness, and problem-solving can be taught alongside traditional academic content. These lessons prepare students to manage stress, build confidence, and develop healthy coping strategies that

they can use both inside and outside of school. A supportive curriculum also contributes to safer and more inclusive environments, reducing the risks of bullying, peer pressure, and other negative influences that can harm students' mental wellbeing.

Ultimately, fostering mental health support services in schools requires a collective effort from educators, parents, and policymakers. Early detection through awareness programs, access to professional counseling, stigma reduction, and the integration of mental health into the curriculum are all essential steps. By prioritizing these measures, schools can provide a nurturing environment where students feel safe, valued, and understood. With the right systems in place, young people are more likely to achieve academic success while also developing the emotional strength needed to face life's challenges. Promoting mental health is not only about addressing problems when they arise but also about creating a foundation of wellbeing that allows every student to thrive.

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