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Mental Health and Its Effect on Positive Behavior for Economically Disadvantaged Students

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Recommended Citation

Corbin, Shameika M., "Mental Health and Its Effect on Positive Behavior for Economically Disadvantaged Students" (2014). *Georgia Association for Positive Behavior Support Conference*. 61.
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Mental Health and Its Effect on Positive Behavior for Economically Disadvantaged Students

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Breaking the Ice...

"Paper in the Bucket"



"... Although historically mental health has been viewed through the lens of mental illness, (e.g., depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disease), we have come to recognize that good mental health is not simply the absence of illness but also the possession of skills necessary to cope with life's challenges. As educators we need to understand the role mental health plays in the school context because it is so central to our students' social, emotional, and academic success."

(© 2003, National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814, www.nasponline.org)

The Role of Poverty

- Hunger
- Hygiene
- Low-Performing
- Lack of Medical Attention
- Family Influence

Guide to Teaching Students with Mental Health Disorders...

STEP 1: Identifying...

- **Keep records of observations**
Teachers who are concerned about a student should keep clear, concise notes of the indicators and incidents that may later help health professionals determine whether a student has depression.
- **Consult with a school counselor**
If a teacher has a concern about a student, he or she should compare notes with other teachers and discuss observations with a school counselor and perhaps the principal.
- **Develop support strategies**
Students continue to attend school during the time they are being assessed for depression, and after a formal diagnosis most students with depression remain in school. They will benefit from extra support and understanding from teachers.

Creating An Inviting Classroom

Creating an inviting environment where students feel safe to take healthy risks is important, as students with depression may avoid school if they feel threatened or insecure there. The emotional tone of a classroom is powerful, especially to students with depression.

- avoid singling out the student with depression from the rest of the class
- be a good listener
- demonstrate unconditional acceptance of students, though not necessarily their behaviors. This is vital to students with depression
- keep a positive tone; humour is great but sarcasm is hurtful
- keep suggestions for improvement constructive, specific, and brief
- avoid over-generalization using words like "always" and "never"
- be specific in providing feedback about when, where, how and why either behaviour or academic work needs to improve
- develop routines or rituals that are conducive to learning

Teaching Organizational Strategies

- Prompt students to use agenda books or day-timers for assignments and tests. Memory is not reliable when a person is mentally unstable.
- Encourage students to use positive self-talk and problem solving when confronted by difficult work. Teachers can model this by talking about times when they used positive self-talk to overcome a challenging situations.
- Normally, as students mature, teachers expect students to take the initiative to request help but this is hard for students with mental health issues.

Instructional Strategies

- Maintain a pleasant, interested tone and be prepared to listen; do not press students for details on family problems or therapy.
- Find out what motivates students, such as working with music, popular culture, unique books and how they learn best (visually, audibly, etc.)
- Be aware of any special needs or learning problems
- Initiate conversation when students arrive, leave, or during breaks, as students with depression are not likely to do so.
- Stop by students' desks during seat work or sit in on small groups.

Building a Support Network

Students need to be encouraged to build a network of support from parents, teachers, and friends. As much as they are able, they need to let people know how they are doing. At school, they may choose a teacher or counselor to be an advocate to assist them in communicating with their other teachers.

- Maintain contact with a few friends by talking to them regularly and participating in activities that have been part of their regular routine.
- Use assertive communication rather than fighting, shouting, or yelling. "I don't like it when you pull my jacket. Keep your hands to yourself!"
- Walk with a friend, an older buddy or a teacher during recess or breaks. This minimizes the feeling of being left out when the student sees other students having fun or seeming to have many friends.

Counseling Related Strategies

- Coaching students to use positive self-talk
- Encouraging students to follow healthy living practices
- Encouraging students to participate in community programs
- Helping students "find" their own gifts and talents

Lingering Questions & Concerns

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