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## An Evidence Based Practice Guide for Parents and Schools: Supporting Kids and Adolescents' Mental Health During and After COVID-19 Pandemic

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# AN EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

SUPPORTING KIDS AND ADOLESCENTS' MENTAL  
HEALTH DURING AND AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

WRITTEN BY

Ivanna Fuentes

4.11.21





## Introduction

This guide provides evidence-based recommendations to help parents and schools prevent and treat mental health issues among adolescents during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools can be an excellent resource for parents and the mental health of their children as long as parents and the school build a relationship in order to promote the well-being of the kids and youth, especially in regards to the COVID-19 pandemic and all that it has brought with it in terms of mental health challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the lives of people in various ways, but one of the most notable has been the mental health of individuals. Therefore, through evidence-based information the importance of these recommendations can be broadly shown. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through a survey conducted by Qualtrics to adults concluded that, more than 40% of the respondents had a mental health condition or adverse behavior. Among these, 30.9% said

# Introduction Continued

they had presented symptoms of anxiety disorder or depressive disorder, more than 13% increased the use of substances and more than 10.5% have seriously considered committing suicide (Czeisler et al., 2020). Since many people have had to remain locked in their homes for long periods of time, even inside the house they have had to be isolated without any contact when they have tested positive for COVID-19 in order to protect their family members. Physical and social contact has been very limited, many schools, amusement parks, and public places closed. Young people have had more insecurity at home due to the loss of jobs that many parents have faced or decreases in working hours. The loss of many human lives has also been experienced, which has caused family instability, more trauma and other consequences that directly impacts everyone, regardless of age.

According to Mental Health of America (2021), more youth ages 11 to 17 have been taking more screening tests throughout the COVID-19 situation. In the same way they affirmed that young people at this age are more prone to depression and anxiety, which can vary in intensity range. Verywell Mind conducted an online questionnaire to 1000 parents responsible for children between the ages of 4 and 18 and they determined that 20% of parents have extreme concern regarding the mental health of their children and more than 59% have a moderate concern (Morin, 2021). We can see that there is a concern and a problem that has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that is affecting our communities, specially adolescents, their parents and at the same time it is affecting schools since these youths and adolescents reflect these symptoms and behaviors in their school performance.

# Recommendation 1

HELP YOUNG PEOPLE BUILD MENTAL HEALTH STRENGTH.

**Parents need to build a strengthened mentality in their children and with the school support the results would be greater.**

More than 74% of parents have identified in their children, ages 4 to 18, that they have shown worrying behaviors as a result of the impact of COVID-19 (Morin, 2021). Parents can play a very fundamental role in how their children can be better let for challenging situations, bullying, stress, anxiety, and other inconveniences that any person can suffer. When it comes to these situations, most of the parents reported doubts about being prepared for mental health issues on their kids. Therefore, it would be good if parents can help their children to strengthen their self-confidence, to speak when they are not feeling well, make them aware of their strengths, create positive thoughts, and others mindsets that can strengthen their mind in order to prevent them from having some mental health issues and reduce the current ones. It will help them to know how to deal in a positive and effective way with the challenges and barriers that they may encounter in their lives.



In order to achieve this, collaboration between parents and schools can be extremely powerful since if the parent understands that their children need professional help rather than the help a parent can provide, therapy such as Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be administered, schools offer therapy services free of charge which is a great support for parents. Consequently, through collaboration between parents and a school social worker, or school psychologist, an adolescent at risk of mental health problems or with an early stage mental health problem can avoid developing into a serious mental health disorder.

# Recommendation 1 continued

## **Mental Strength**

- The ability to cope with negative emotions in a healthy way.
- Understanding your emotions
- Knowing when to engage with your emotions and when to take step back

## **Mental Health**

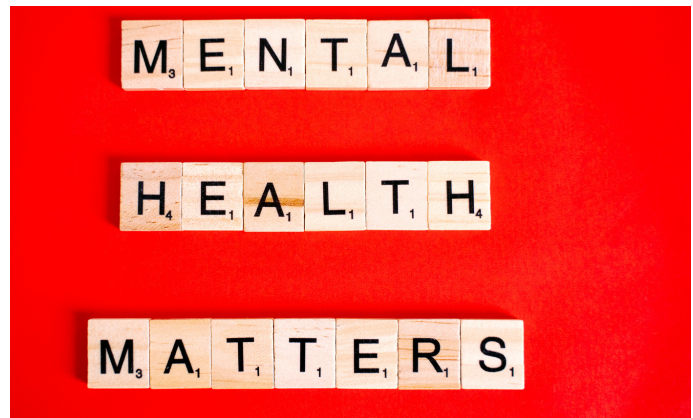
- The presence of absence of a mental health issues.
- The overall state of your mental wellness.

(Morin, 2020)

# Recommendation 2

## SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

**The active participation of schools is needed in order to support kids and adolescents mental health and create parent awareness about mental health.**



Students spend a lot of their time in their schools and these institutions usually have as a mission the present and future success of their students and to have them ready to engage with their communities in the future. For example, the Logan school district announced, "our mission is to ensure all students leave our schools ready to create a positive future for themselves and their community". The Cache County School District says, "Our mission is to educate students for success in a changing world". Also, and, in many cases, schools have the resources to carry out early interventions through social workers, psychologists, intern psychologist- students and intern social workers- can take an active role regarding mental health to ensure students well-being.

ig. Studies found that the areas in which parents of children between the ages of 4 and 18 are experiencing the greatest challenge today - since COVID-19 pandemic- are, getting chores / homework done with more than 40%, staying on task exceeding 38% , and 37% in motivating themselves to do things they don't want to do (Morin, 2021). If we notice, these are all activities that affect students' performance. It also interferes with the accomplishment of their mission and goals. We must consider that students may initiate emotional disorders as a result of situations at school with peers such as bullying that can lead to depression and isolation.

# *Recommendation 2 continued*

For these reasons attention should be paid in this area since it may be that the consequences of mental health in youths during this stage should be addressed. Whereby, it is pertinent that parents understand that schools have many available resources to educate parents and help them identify early symptoms of mental health in adolescents and assist in therapy if needed.

School personnel who are dedicated to students mental health can do an excellent job. Greater school engagement in early identification increases the number of adolescents with mild to moderate mental health situations who receive mental health services (Green et al., 2013). School districts might consider including mental health topics during parent meetings at least three times a year where parents can learn from the mental health professionals who work in the schools about how to build mental strength, symptoms of mental disorders; promote and increase communication among parents, teachers, and counselors; and create a relationship where parents feel that the school can help them with their concerns about the mental health of their children. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic an increase in mental health problems arises in the world including children and adolescents. It was verified through studies such as an investigation carried out in order to obtain information on the mental health of Chinese students in ages 7 to 18 years. It determined that as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19, 9.8% of clinical depression in this population increased, based on a comparison with a study from 2007 (Duan et al., 2020).



# Recommendation 3

TRY TO BE AWARE OF THE EARLY SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES THAT AN ADOLESCENT CAN FACE.

**When parents are able to identify early signs of mental health problems, they can prevent the problem from becoming greater and the school can help parents learn about these early signs.**

Morin (2021) stated that many parents have noticed that their children are stressed and that they cannot cope well with many current challenges of COVID-19 and have had many changes in behavior. This shows us that parents need information and help. For this reason, it is good that they approach health professionals who can help them learn more about the symptoms that their children are presenting. Also learn about the different signs that they should not ignore. In this part the school personnel from the mental health area - counselors, social workers, psychologists and teachers - could be a great support regarding guiding parents in this area. Parents can better understand what is happening with their children and even create stronger relationships by following suggestions from these professionals.



Parents must first intervene in the process of identifying the first symptoms, since they know more about the behaviors of their children and children usually spend most of their time at home. Then, school is the second place where children and young people spend most of their time and can present changes or signs that can be noticed. For this reason and because many schools have services of mental health, parents could be more informed, and adolescents can have therapy sessions by the mental health staff in order to ensure the well-being of the adolescent. Even so, the work of schools can be more possible and effective if parents help reinforce it at home.

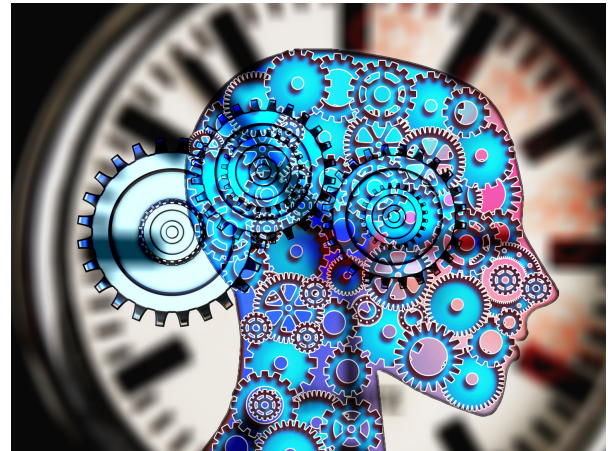
# Recommendation 3 continued

Parents who have been educated about mental health have reported feeling more confident to help and interact with someone who is experiencing some type of Mental health Illness and were even motivated to talk about this topic with their children and between parents. They also helped raise awareness by sharing some information and their own reflections on their social networks (. Which leads us to see that when parents are informed, they can be a better resource for themselves, their children and many other people (Hurley et al., 2019).

# Recommendation 4

## SEEK HELP AT THE FIRST SIGNS OF MENTAL ISSUES.

Parents play a fundamental role in identifying symptoms of mental health problems in their kids and it can make a big difference whether parents seek help when they show signs and symptoms or have suspicions of possible mental disorders.



According to a study conducted by University of Cincinnati, students reported positive changes after seeking professional help such as reducing stress, improving their mental functioning and their ability to solve problems, among others. On the other hand, it was reported that there are stigmas regarding mental health that can sometimes be barriers to seeking help, such as not being able to handle their problems, among others (Vidourek et al., 2014). Therefore, it would be good to consider the benefits of seeking professional help and understand that there are many stigmas that may lead individuals not to receive professional help in time when having mental health issues.

There are situations where the lack of general knowledge about treatments and how to access services create another barrier in addition to the existing prejudices in relation to people who suffer from a mental illness and fear of being discriminated against (Henderson et al., 2013). So, I would recommend that you seek guidance, consider how important mental health is, what effects it may have on kids and adolescents and that seeking help at the first signs helps avoid a serious issues.

In short, parents should not delay seeking help for their children and themselves at the first sign when they recognize something is wrong with their mental health. In addition, talking to a therapist may give parents and their children helpful strategies for building mental strength, staying mentally healthy, and combating stress.

# Recommendation 5

## PARENTS ENGAGE IN THEIR CHILD MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.

**If the parents engage with the treatment of their children, they can be better informed, reinforce the work done by the therapist at home and be a more effective support for the adolescent.**

A Meta-analysis made by educators and mental health professionals have shown that parental participation in their child mental health activities has had a positive influence on children in reference to their social-emotional or behavioral competence, mental health, and academic performance. Another important factor that was determined was a positive change in the attitude and practice of the parents regarding the child (Smith et al., 2020). All of these results as indicated by the study findings are long-term and are shown based on active involvement of the school and parents. It is important to maintain this since we can make a difference in the lives of children and young people who face difficulties and challenges daily.

If young people are not prepared and do not have the support of their parents and the school, it could create an inconsistency in their feelings, attitudes and behaviors that will affect them even more in the future. Also, Morin (2021) found on research results that more than 30% of the parents struggle when it comes to helping their child to regulate their emotions, lead with challenges, and help them to have more positiveness. Therefore, it is very likely that if parents have constant communication with their children's therapist, together they can work on that. In this way, parents can play a more active role in the treatment of their children through the support of the therapist and can even have some sessions together.



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