

Mental Health Toolkit for Teachers

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What Is
Mental
Health?

**Emotional Well-being +
Psychological Well-being +
Social Well-being = Mental
Health**

Mental Health

- **Mental health affects our behavior, feelings, cognitive functioning, how stress is handled, our relation to others and decision making.**
- **Mental health can be affected by biological factors, our own experiences in life, and if there are any mental health problems in our family history.**
- **There are early warning signs to be aware of to see if you or someone else is experiencing mental health problems, Few of these signs include: having low energy, sleeping or eating too little or too much, feeling hopeless or thinking of harming yourself or others.**
- **We need to have positive mental health. Having this will allow us to cope with stress more easily and become more productive. Staying positive, helping others and having good physical health all contribute to maintaining your positive mental health.**

What is positive psychology?

- Martin Seligman defined **positive psychology** as a “scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive” (“What is Positive Psychology?”, 2004).
- Focuses on people’s strengths, talents, high achievement, and fulfilling relationships
- When a student is not doing well academically or is acting out, teachers will tend to focus on those negative aspects and will label that student as a troublesome child. With positive psychology, a teacher should look at the strengths a child has academically so that he or she can see how the student succeeds in that subject. By doing this, the teacher can find strategies to help the student generalize his or her success in other subjects that the student is struggling with.



Promoting Student Wellness

- Wellness means choosing a healthy lifestyle and making sound decisions that promote a positive physical, mental, and social-emotional well-being.
- In the school setting, mental wellness should be discussed as a branch of overall wellness.
- In turn, schools are in the perfect position to create a culture of wellness because children spend the majority of their days at school.
- Check out the CDC's website for information on improving your school wellness policy.

Common Diagnoses and Concerns

Your students may have a wide variety of mental health diagnoses that you may or may not be aware of unless they disclose it to you. Nevertheless, there are some mental health diagnoses and concerns that are more common amongst adolescents that you should know some basic information about in order to support students in your classroom and to identify potential warning signs that may warrant a referral for the student to the school counselor to get extra support.

Depression

Mood disorder that impacts thoughts, feelings, and daily activities, like sleeping, eating and working

- Occurs in ~13% of 12- to 17-year-olds
- Signs and symptoms
 - Persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
 - Feelings of hopelessness
 - Irritability
 - Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
 - Decreased energy or fatigue

Anxiety Disorders

Involve feelings of excessive uneasiness, worry, and fear

- Occurs in ~32% of 13- to 18-year-olds
- Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder
 - Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge
 - Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
 - Being easily fatigued
 - Having difficulty concentrating; mind going blank
 - Being irritable

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Involves continued inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with daily functioning

- Occurs in ~9% of 13- to 18-year-olds
- Symptoms of Inattention
 - Overlook or miss details, make careless mistakes in school work and in other activities
 - Have problems maintaining attention in class or when doing lengthy assignments
 - Not appearing to be listening when spoken to
- Symptoms of Hyperactivity-Impulsivity
 - Fidget and squirm in their seats
 - Talk non-stop
 - Have trouble waiting their turn

Eating Disorders

Involve extreme or abnormal eating behaviors

- Occurs in ~3% of 13- to 18-year-olds
- Symptoms of Anorexia Nervosa
 - Extremely restricted eating
 - Extreme Thinness
 - Intense fear of gaining weight
- Symptoms of Bulimia Nervosa
 - Chronically inflamed and sore throat
 - Severe dehydration
 - Increasingly sensitive and decaying teeth
- Symptoms of Binge-Eating Disorder
 - Eating until uncomfortably full
 - Eating large amounts of food in a specific period of time
 - Feeling distressed, ashamed, or guilty about eating

Suicide/Suicidal Thoughts

- Second leading cause of death for those 15- to 24-years old
- Warning Signs
 - Feeling like a burden
 - Being isolated
 - Extreme mood swings
 - Expressing hopelessness
 - Talking or posting about wanting to die

Non-Suicidal Self Injury

- Estimated lifetime prevalence among high school students is 12-23%
- Warning Signs
 - Unexplained, frequent injuries
 - Difficulty handling feelings
 - Poor functioning at school and at home
 - Attempts to hide injuries, e.g. wearing long sleeves and pants even in hot weather

Cultural Diversity Factors/Implications

- Nayaran Gopalkrishnan defines culture as a, “multidimensional set of... group identities to which religion, language, and race (as a social construct) belong and all of which contribute to a person’s view of themselves” (2018). This diversity impacts mental health in many ways, including how people perceive illness and health and how they seek treatment.
- How we define mental health issues and determine treatment is rooted in a Western way of thinking.
- Five components of diverse cultures that mental health professionals should know:
 - Emotional expression- other cultures may be hesitant to express feelings and/or may think expression of painful issues could lead to more painful feelings
 - Shame- do not want to feel like a disappointment, especially in cultures that heavily emphasize and value family
 - Power distance- therapists/ other mental health professionals are seen as distant, or there is a power struggle between them and their clients
 - Collectivism- in collectivist cultures, they may rely more heavily on family/community than mental health professionals
 - Spirituality and religion- similar to collectivism, this may be more heavily relied on than mental health professionals

(Gopalkrishnan, 2018).

Red Flags

- Red flags: According to McCarthy (2017), when a student exhibits 5+ signs of poor mental health for more than two weeks, a mental health professional should be notified.
 - Some red flags include:
 - Significant weight loss or weight gain that occurs in a short period of time
 - Exhaustion or, in the classroom, students that are constantly falling asleep at their desk during class
 - Withdrawal from classroom or other activities that they used to be particularly interested in
 - Inability to concentrate during class and/or during conversations with teachers and others
- What should you do if you notice these red flags in your students?
 - Express concern for the student and acknowledge the differences you have noticed
 - If they are open to discussion, ask questions such as “When did you start feeling this way?”
 - Know what to and what not to say
 - Do say: I am here for you, I am here to help you find resources, etc.
 - Don’t say: Look at the bright side, this happens to everyone, etc.
 - Validate the way they feel
 - Know school and local resources that they can be referred to
- (McCarthy, 2017)

Risk Factors



- Fertman, Delgado, and Tarasevich (2014), define **risk factors** as “factors associated with the increased likelihood of a behavior that usually has negative consequences.” These negative consequences include alcohol and substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school dropout, violence, and mental health concerns and problems.
- Teachers should know that every student in their classroom come from different backgrounds, which include various risk factors. Teachers should be able to provide a positive environment in their classroom for their students. This could be the buffer to prevent students from walking down the wrong path in engaging in negative actions.

Examples of Risk Factors

Domain	Risk Factors
Child	Complications during birth and early infancy Difficult temperament (overly shy or aggressive) Poor social and emotional skills Pessimistic outlook on life
Family	Family instability or breakup (divorce) Overly harsh or inconsistent discipline style Parent/caregiver or sibling with serious illness, mental illness or substance abuse, or disability
School	Unsafe school climate, Peer rejection and/or bullying Distrust and friction between family and school Persistent academic failure, Poor attendance Few opportunities to contribute to the school community or develop interests outside of classroom

Examples of Risk Factors

Domain	Risk Factors
Life Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Frequent, difficult school transitionsDeath of a family memberExposure to traumatic event(s)Experience of physical or sexual abuse
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Discrimination, IsolationLack of access to support servicesSocioeconomic disadvantageHigh levels of neighborhood violence

Statistics

Why it is important to address mental health

- An estimate of 10% of children and adolescents have significant mental health problems that impact their daily lives, and can continue through adulthood if untreated (Membride, 2016).
 - If we do not address mental health early on, it can lead to terrible consequences such as, suicide among youth, substance abuse, etc.
 - Second leading cause of death for ages 10-34 is suicide, and it is the tenth leading cause of death in the US (“Preventing Suicide”, 2019).
 - It is important to have a strong Tier 1 (prevention/early intervention) placed at schools to support all students who may have a mental health problem and to prevent certain problems from occurring or getting worse.
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Systems Approach to Mental Health

Mental health in schools can be a complex system with many actors and many moving parts. As a teacher, you may not even be aware of all that goes on to support the mental health of your students since you are involved with some parts of it but not others. What follows is an overview of some components of the system.

How the system works as a whole

School based mental health services

- Schools have become, for many children and adolescents, their primary mental health services provider thus taking away the barriers of cost and accessibility
 - Schools provide assessment, intervention, and referrals
 - Addressing mental health in schools not only involves the school (teachers, counselors, administrators, nurses), but also families, the community, and outside service providers. The school may collaborate with all these other actors to ensure they are best meeting the needs of their students
 - It is multifaceted, involving counseling, psychological, and social services, health education and services, involvement of students, families, and the community, and an environment that supports students and effectively addresses issues
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Teams

Schools have multiple teams that aim to serve students in academics as well as in other areas such as safety and behavior support

Academic Concerns Teams

- Typically comprised of school staff and operate at the school mainly dealing with academic issues
- Includes multiple teams such as: grade-level teams, subject-area teams, curriculum planning teams, school improvement teams, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams.
- Teachers will likely be contributing members of many of these teams as their work in the classroom is directly impacted by them

Student Support Teams

- Typically comprised of school staff, community-based agencies and programs, government agencies, clergy, community members, parents, and sometimes students.
 - Examples of student support teams: school safety teams, crisis response teams, student assistance teams, positive behavioral support teams, bullying prevention teams, and coordinated school health teams
 - Teachers may be contributing members of some of these teams or will interact with them through the teams' direct contact with them and support of their work with students in the classroom
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Policy

Policy on mental health is typically set at the district level and includes policies regarding suicide, threats, harassment, crisis response, and substance abuse.

District policy is important for school staff because it ensures that actions are following the law, provides a plan for response to mental health concerns that may arise, provides a step-by-step guide and clarifies the roles of different staff for when an incident occurs so everyone knows exactly what they need to do.

MTSS

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

- Tier 1 - Universal interventions for all students
 - Examples: screening, reinforcement system for positive behavior (PBIS), code of conduct, social-emotional skill instruction
 - Tier 2 - Small groups for targeted students
 - Examples: group counseling and support groups for students in need of emotional regulation and social skills
 - Tier 3 - Intensive for individual students
 - Examples: crisis counseling, referral for mental health assessment, and one-on-one counseling
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How do Schools Play a Role?

- Schools act as primary access for mental health services through prevention, assessment, intervention, and referrals.
 - It is estimated that among children who receive mental health services, 70-80% initially receive them at school.
 - Unfortunately, funding for community resources is decreasing so schools are more responsible for access to services.
- Improving Access
 - Connect students to community agencies
 - Refer students to school-based resources
 - School-based Mental Health Centers (SBMNC): led by teachers and counselors, these serve students with limited access to services such as minority, poor, and rural youth.
 - Reduces common barriers to seeking help such as cost, transportation, scheduling conflicts, and stigma

What are the Specific Roles of Individuals in the School?

- Teachers should know which specific individuals to refer to when it comes to students with mental health concerns.



What are the Specific Roles of Individuals in the School?

- **School-Based Health Clinics**

- Students and their families can come to the school for all medical, social-emotional, and/or behavioral issues
- These services are available to all children who attend that school
- There are many different types of school mental health professionals and service providers who work with children in schools to provide services
 - Some providers specialize in specific services or programs and others provide a wider range of services

What are the Specific Roles of Individuals in the School?

- **School Counselor**

- Work with students, school staff, families, and members of the community as an integral part of the education program
- Deliver classroom lessons and provide individual and small group counseling on a variety of topics
- Consult and collaborate with teachers, staff, and parents to understand and meet the needs of students and remove barriers to student learning
- Identify students with mental health needs
- Coordinate mental health teams
- Make appropriate referrals to mental health professionals
- Follow up to make sure services are provided
- Address academic, career, and personal/social developmental needs of all students



What are the Specific Roles of Individuals in the School?

- **School Social Worker**

- Mental health provider who provides a range of prevention and intervention services for students and their families as it pertains to their education
- Services range from school level prevention and school climate initiatives, to peer mediation, group-based interventions, individual counseling and behavior planning, and crisis intervention
- Serve as a liaison between families and the school and as an advocate for the best interests of the child by participating in Planning and Placement Team meetings, providing outreach, home visits, and linkage to community-based services and supports

What are the Specific Roles of Individuals in the School?

- **School Psychologist**
 - Provide psychological testing, assessment, prevention, and intervention services in the school setting
 - Offer a variety of therapeutic and assessment services to help students with academic and learning difficulties such as formal evaluation and consultation; counseling or therapy to address family stressors in the home environment; skill development to address social, emotional, and behavioral problems; and evidence-based treatment to address identified or diagnosed conditions, all with a goal of improving a student's academic, social, and emotional functioning
 - Are integral to the school community, also providing consultation to parents and families, staff, and administration and facilitating referrals for services outside of the school as needed

What are the Specific Roles of Individuals in the School?

- **School Nurse**
 - Receive specialized training to provide services and supports to prevent and treat general health and wellness concerns of students and to promote a safe and healthy school environment
 - Are often the first school staff member to be consulted for students with emerging mental health concerns and they often consult with other health and mental health professionals outside of the school through referral and case management



What are the Specific Roles of Individuals in the School?

- **Paraprofessional**

- May complete administrative duties for the school or classroom, provide supervision or monitoring of individuals or groups of students, engage in teaching or tutoring, assist with classroom behavior management, or have specialized training to provide particular academic or behavioral interventions for students with special needs
- May provide general support and assistance to the primary teacher or may be assigned to provide individualized support to one student throughout the day based on the child's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) requirements

What are the Specific Roles of Individuals in the School?

- **Natural and Informal Supports**
 - This includes parents, friends, coaches, religious clergy, child care providers, mentors
 - Assist mental health providers in preventing, identifying, and monitoring the mental health needs of a child



Legal and Ethical Issues

- Confidentiality - ethically, teachers are supposed to keep things that they learn about students through working with them confidential except in particular circumstances where they are required to disclose this information to another professional so that the proper steps can be taken to inform the student's parents and get the student the help that they need. The California Teachers Association Code of Ethics includes that teachers "Shall not disclose information about students obtained in the course of professional service unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law." (California Teachers Association, 1975, 1)
- Times when confidentiality needs to be broken
 - If you become aware that a student is harming themselves*
 - If you become aware that a student has suicidal ideations*
 - If disclosure is necessary in supporting the education of the student

* you may become aware of these things through things the student specifically discloses to you, through writings by the student, through notes you may find between students, or through conversations you may overhear between students

Legal and Ethical Issues

- Who to report to - any of these people will be able to help the student and also contact the student's parents as is required in these circumstances
 - School Counselor
 - School Psychologist
 - Administration
- Teachers should also be aware of the warning signs for potential mental health problems to look for with students (See Red Flags section) and refer to the school counselor, nurse, or administrator that will also connect with the student's parents if necessary to get them proper support and evaluation

Steps in Addressing School-Wide Mental Health

School Policy

School policies need to be reflective of the needs of the school community. It is important to involve all stakeholders (students, parents, school staff) in the decision-making process to promote the well-being of the entire school community.

Screening

Screening should be one of the first steps in addressing mental health needs. Screenings allow for early identification and prevention. Depending on the resources of the school, screenings can be given universally or individually.

Progress Monitoring

Measuring progress allows professionals to determine whether an intervention is meeting the student's needs. Mental health teams are able to adjust or build more effective interventions if the current one is not working.

School Policy

- Schools usually have a specific set of policies and guidelines regarding mental health procedures
 - Some schools may call them behavioral health policies
 - Policies should always be kept up to date and align with the school's existing goals
 - Policies must outline both preventive and preemptive actions
- Include topics such as:
 - Crisis response
 - Substance abuse
 - Threats policies
 - Suicide
 - Harassment
 - Code of conduct policy
 - Mental health referral policy
- Teachers can access these policies/protocols on their school's website or school handbook, or by inquiring in the principal and/or superintendent's office
 - Teachers and other staff members should also be trained on these policies/guidelines before implementation

School Policy

(continued)

- Sample mental health policies in the OC area:
 - [SAUSD Non-Discrimination and Harassment](#)
 - Also includes policies on topics such as sexual harassment and LGBTQ+ support
 - [IUSD Mental Health and Wellness](#)
 - Includes multiple resources and programs used throughout their schools
 - Includes prevention and intervention plan and crisis and intervention response
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Screening

- All students can surely benefit from mental health services, but some students need extra support.
- As a teacher, you are the primary observer in the classroom. Here, collaboration with other school personnel is key towards identifying which students would benefit from interventions.
- The purpose of screening is to identify students at risk, identify students who may need monitoring or intervention (secondary, tertiary), and finally, based on needs, make decisions for needed services.
- When conducting a screening process, consider ethical, legal issues such as student privacy and parent/guardian consent.

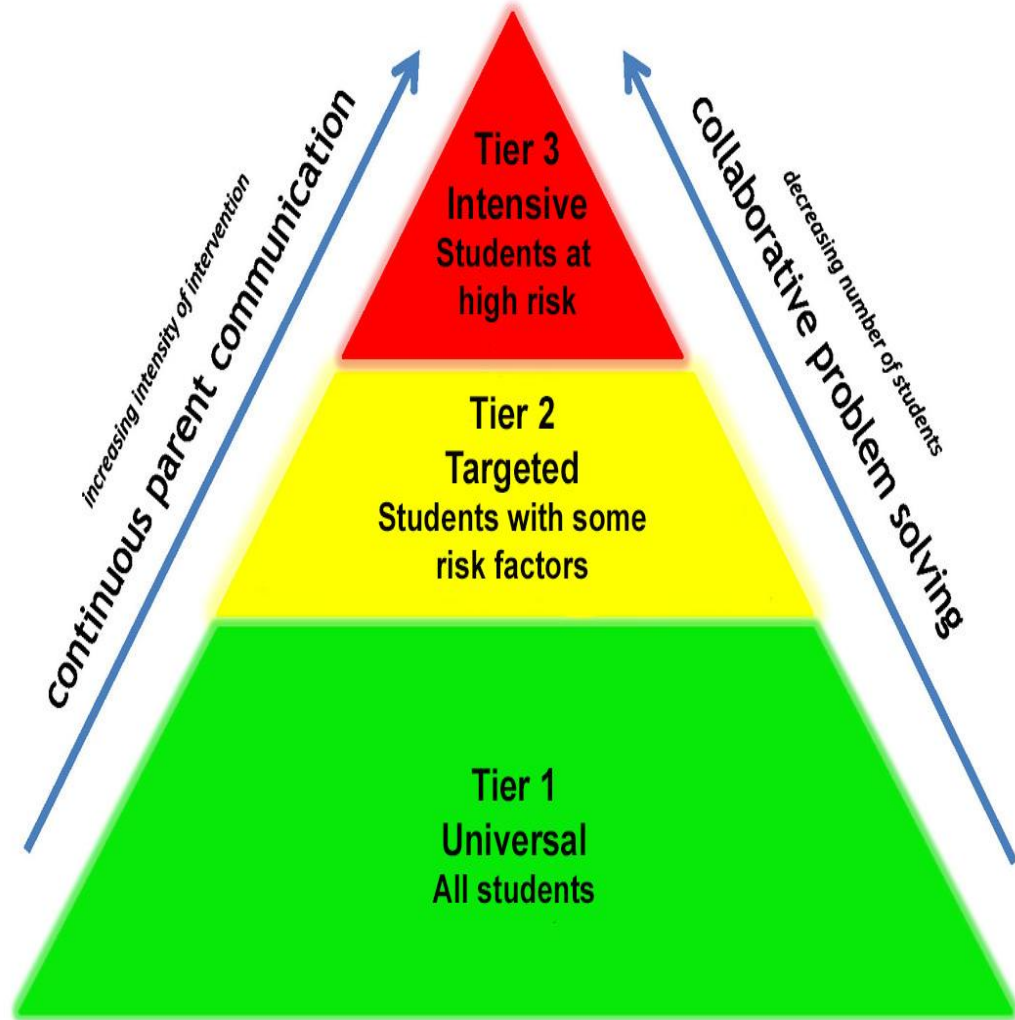
Steps in the Screening Process:

1. First, you would want to create a team to involve family-school-community stakeholders to implement a universal screening process.
2. Next, select screening tools that are reliable, valid, and evidence-based such as school climate surveys, screening program to identify students at risk of suicide, functional behavior assessments, teacher or student nominations, and needs assessments.

Progress Monitoring

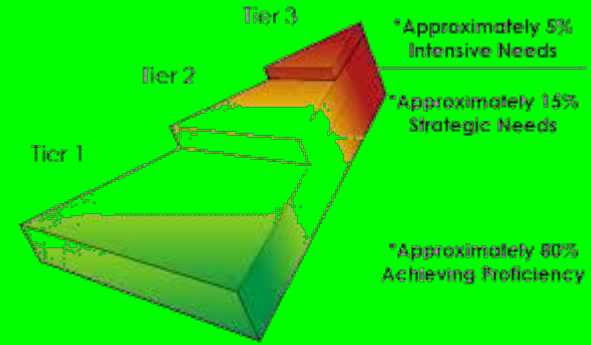
- After needs assessments or other forms of screening have been conducted, it is important to know if the program is working. In order to monitor the effectiveness of a program, we need to see how students are improving based on their goals and needs.
 - Progress monitoring is used to assess student progress or performance in areas in which they were identified as being at-risk. If the student needs additional support, he or she would be moved up a tier.
 - Progress monitoring involves built-in assessments to monitor fidelity, how close it aligns to the original goals of the program.
- Your role:
 - You may be asked to fill out checklists and tools provided by counselor or other school personnel.
 - Tools can include Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) and behavior charts. These should be administered monthly, ideally weekly or biweekly.
 - Here is an example of a mental health progress monitoring tool:
<https://wa.kaiserpermanente.org/static/pdf/public/specialties/questionnaires/behavioral-health.pdf>

A Multi-Tiered Approach



Tier 1

- Universal Interventions -> For all students. Early Intervention/Prevention
- Preventive, Proactive
- Performance based instruction
- Parent Workshops
- School wide lessons for a greater understanding -> core classroom instruction, assembly, posters/visuals on campus, etc.
- Around 80-90% of the school population
- Reading, writing, math, behavior interventions.
- Have effective classroom practices
- Include social and emotional content in classroom instructions
- Six principles for effective instruction - Focus on big ideas, Conspicuous Strategies, Mediated Scaffolding, Strategic Integration, Primed Background Knowledge, Judicious Review. (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016)
- Tier 1 intervention toolkit -> <https://sites.google.com/site/interventionrx/tier-1-toolkit>



Tier 2

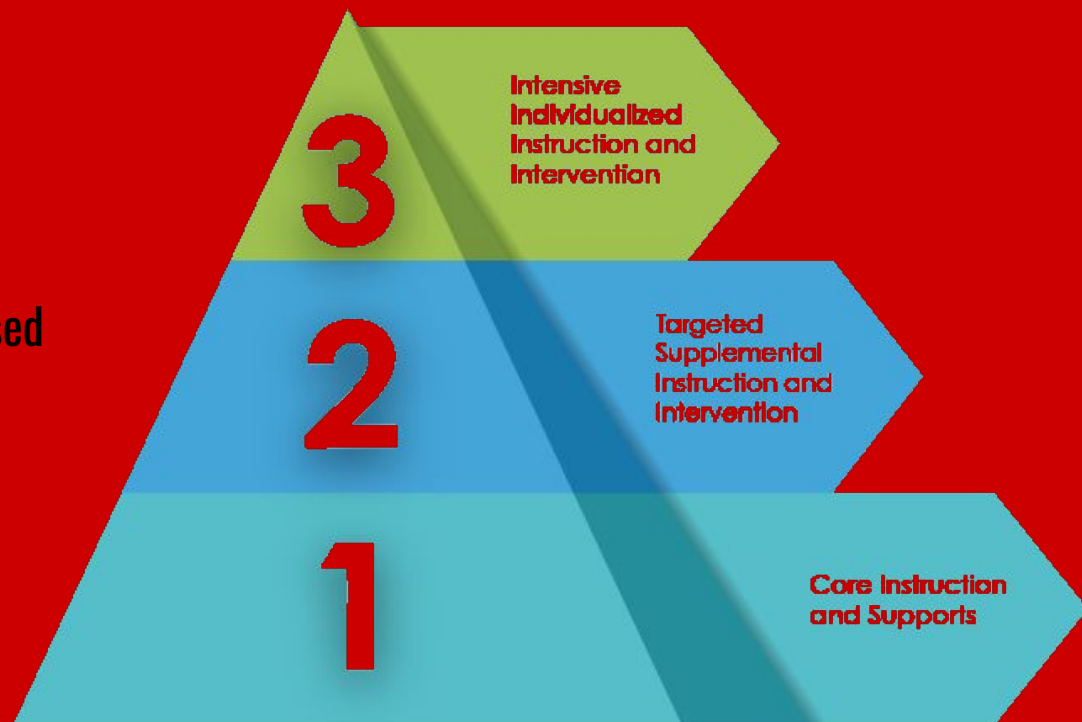


TIER 2: INSTRUCTION, INTERVENTIONS, AND SUPPORT

- **Secondary Support**
- **About 5-15% of the school population**
- **In addition to Tier 1**
- **Rapid Response, High Efficiency**
- **Interventions for “at risk” students.**
- **Core instruction + supplemental support with higher intensity and more time than Tier 1**
- **Assess students with: Academic problems, behavior problems, interrelated academic and behavior problems or neither. (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016)**
 - **Example: Students who engage in unwanted behavior to gain attention from adults or peers, or an escape from something.**
- **Progress monitoring**
 - **Weekly/bi-weekly**
 - **How is student responding to intervention?**

Tier 3

- Tertiary Interventions
- In addition to Tier 1 and Tier 2
- High Intensity, Assessment-based
- Individualized Interventions (one-on-one or small groups)
- Customized to be geared to “at-high-risk” students
- Around 5% of the school population



Checklists

Does your school implement the following practices?

Best Practice	✓ or X
Has a school wellness team that targets mental health.	
Active collaboration with community mental health agencies.	
Suicide prevention program	
Teacher wellness programs of support	
Social-emotional learning programs	

Checklists

Creating a positive mental health environment.

Best Practice	✓ or X
Teacher keeps all students engaged in the classroom	
Teacher challenges students to meet their maximum potential	
School provides access to basic mental health resources	
Adults on campus are approachable to students	
Social-emotional programs such as anti-bullying programs are in place.	



Tools

Mental Health Check-In

- Gives you an opportunity to be proactive in finding out how your students are doing
- Students who might not display signs that they are struggling can get support if they want it
- You are helping to create an environment where mental health is discussed and supported

Image Source:

<https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/wellness/story/teacher-created-mental-health-check-chart-students-now-62169283>

Tools

Goal Attainment Scaling Worksheet

Patient stated goal	SMART goal	Importance	Difficulty of achieving	Baseline	Achieved	Improvement	Variance
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Not Imp<input type="checkbox"/> Imp<input type="checkbox"/> V Imp<input type="checkbox"/> Ex Imp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Not Difficult<input type="checkbox"/> Minor Difficulty<input type="checkbox"/> Mod Difficulty<input type="checkbox"/> Extreme Difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Some function<input type="checkbox"/> No function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Yes<input type="checkbox"/> No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Much better (+2)<input type="checkbox"/> A little better (+1)<input type="checkbox"/> As expected (0)<input type="checkbox"/> Part achieved (-1)<input type="checkbox"/> Same as baseline<input type="checkbox"/> Worse (-2)	

FAQs

What can I do in my classroom to support the mental health of my students?

- Be aware of the warning signs of common mental illnesses as you spend the most time at school with students and may be the most likely to notice changes that warrant concern and intervention. Additionally, you can focus on student strengths when they are struggling and aim to create an overall positive and supportive environment for student mental health

How do I know if a student is having a mental health issue?

- Keep an eye out for the signs/symptoms of diagnoses and red flags discussed earlier. Some of these include exhaustion, withdrawal, and difficulty concentrating. If you have concerns, it is best to refer students so they can get extra support

I want my students to feel comfortable talking to me and trusting me enough to keep what they tell me private. However, I know that is not always possible, so when am I required to report something a student says to me?

- *If a student is harming themselves and when a student has suicidal ideations. You are also able to break confidentiality when disclosure is necessary in supporting the education of the student*

Who should I refer students to if I am concerned about their mental health?

- You can refer students to the school counselor or the school psychologist, depending on what your concerns are, to get them the help that they need



Resources

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline**
 - <https://www.thehotline.org/>
 - 1-800-799-7233
 - **Laura's House**
 - <https://www.laurashouse.org/>
 - **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
 - 1-800-273-8255
 - <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
 - **National Sexual Assault Hotline**
 - Call 1-800-656-4673
 - <https://rainn.org>
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Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health
 - <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>
- Mentalhealth.gov
 - <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics>
- Crisis Text Line
 - <https://www.crisistextline.org>
- Nami Helpline
 - <https://nami.org/Find-Support>
 - 1-800-950-NAMI (6264). Mon-Fri 10 A.M.- 6 P.M.
 - Text NAMI to 741741
- Mental Health America
 - <https://www.mhanational.org/MentalHealthInfo>
- American Psychiatric Association
 - <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>
- Online Counseling/Therapy
 - <https://www.regain.us/start/>
 - <https://www.7cups.com/>
 - <https://cimhs.com/>
 - <https://www.talkspace.com/>

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