

Unlocking the Mysteries of Children's Mental Health

An Introduction for Future Teachers Lecture 1



Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health
1-800-528-4511 (MN only)

Prepared by the Minnesota Association for Children’s Mental Health

for the Minnesota Department of Education

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Lecture 1

Introduction to Children's Mental Health and Learning



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Focus:

- The scope and social costs of mental illness in the school aged population
- The relationship between mental health and learning
- The impact teachers can have on lifetime outcomes



Childhood Mental Illness

- All children go through rough times at school, with friends, or in their families
- Most common problems, such as sadness after a family move, clear up with time and maturity
- Consider three things if you suspect a student may be experiencing an emotional problem:
 - **Frequency:** how often does the student exhibit the symptoms?
 - **Duration:** how long do they last?
 - **Intensity:** how severe are the symptoms?



Childhood Mental Illness

Behaviors or moods that:

- Are no longer age-appropriate
- Are much more dramatic than in peers
- Continue for longer than usual

should alert adults to investigate the possibility of a mental health (emotional or behavioral) disorder



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Mental Health

Mental Health is a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. Mental health is indispensable to personal well-being, family and interpersonal relationships, and contribution to community or society. (USDHHS, 1999)



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On Any Given Day...

- Three million American children meet the clinical criteria for mood disorders
- 21% of children and adolescents have a behavioral, emotional, or mental health problem
- One out of every 20 Minnesota children is identified with Severe Emotional Disturbance
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 15-34 in Minnesota. The overall suicide rate is double the homicide rate in the state



Implications for Teachers

“Mental Health is the springboard of thinking and communication skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience, and self-esteem. These are the ingredients of each individual’s successful contribution to community and society. Americans are inundated with messages about success - in school, in a profession, in parenting, in relationships - without appreciating that successful performance rests on a foundation of mental health.”
(USDHHS, 1999)



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Mental Illness Can Be Treated

- Children spend over half their waking hours in school - this makes teachers front line assistants in recognizing and assisting treatment
- Best practice includes therapy, possibly medication, and consistent behavioral support across settings (home, school, community)
- **Every** child with emotional or behavioral challenges has a possibility to succeed in life



Mental Health Disorders May Be Difficult to Recognize

- Mental health disorders emerge during ongoing development and at times may look like misbehavior but are NOT the same
- Disorders in infancy, childhood, and adolescence may not have the same symptoms as in adulthood



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Early Intervention Can...

- Minimize effects on child and family
 - Lessen duration & severity of symptoms
 - Lessen disruption of normal development
 - Increase academic success
 - Increase social success
 - Reduce risk of legal system involvement
 - Reduce risk of family disruption and abuse
- YOU** are a key factor in early intervention



When “Zero Tolerance” or “Discipline” is the Main Focus

- Students are often excluded from educational opportunities
 - Suspension, expulsion
 - Isolated settings
- Co-occurring difficulties with learning are not diagnosed or treated

The Brain at Work = Learning

- **What Helps**
 - Safe environment
 - Meaningful tasks
 - Timely feedback
 - Varied input
- **What Hinders**
 - Anxiety
 - Distraction, aversion
 - Brain disorders



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This presentation and the supporting materials can be downloaded from the following web site: www.macmh.org

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