

The Role of School Counselors in Promoting Mental Health Intervention and Resilience

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EDSC 541 - Mental Health Intervention School Counseling

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December 15, 2023

Evidence-based practices that are integrated into a continuum of care that starts in the classroom and provides an opportunity for individual student care that can fill the gap of equity of access to care according to Fazel et al. (2014). Because children spend more time in school than any other institution, that institution has a moral and ethical obligation to promote mental health. Children who suffer from mental health issues transcend age, race, and economic status. While some groups have a slightly higher risk, all students benefit from mental health interventions. The continuum of care starts at home, extends into the school setting, and can include community partners such as non-profit organizations and mental health professionals.

As a school counselor, we may be the first to respond to mental health concerns. In order to provide the right kind of support, we are in the unique position of being able to consult all of the stakeholders. We can speak with teachers and other staff members to find out what they know about the situation. I would like to be part of the Coordination of Service Team, (COST) or the Student Success Team to help identify which students are at highest risk but I would also want to deliver instruction throughout the year to raise awareness for all students.

Collaboration with other agencies and professionals is important in this role because we can find out key behavioral details and connect students to the right kind of ongoing support by connecting them with agencies that provide those services. A teacher will know key details about behavior that others may be completely unaware of. Certain days may be more triggering than others because of parent custodial days and exchanges. This can cause stress for some students so paying attention to which students have custody issues is important. The first person to know about these issues could be the counseling secretary or the registrar so collaborating with them is essential. It is also important to consult with the attendance clerk who is often the first point of

contact when students miss school due to a death in the family, which can have an adverse effect on the student for years.

Collaboration can come in many forms. Communication with parents is essential because they know their children best and most parents will not ask for help from school staff until a trusting relationship is established. Parents need to know who we are and what kinds of services that we provide. Parent surveys can help establish needs. A monthly parent meeting that serves the needs of the community is a great opportunity to collaborate with parents and guardians. Many students are being raised by foster parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, and grandparents and each of these has a unique voice and specialized needs.

The staff at each school site can vary so it is important to know if there is a parent liaison, school psychologist, or teacher on special assignments as well as many other specialized staff. We need to collaborate with each of these people so that we can make referrals and see what they know about students in need. Even the lunch staff can be extremely helpful in finding out what is going on with students. Going outside during nutrition breaks is another opportunity to observe students and identify who to collaborate with.

As I reflect on my own personality, skills, and talents, I feel that I can improve the delivery of mental health services to the students and families at my school site by using data to identify at-risk students. Many times, students who are struggling with everyday tasks like attending school on time and turning in assignments that maintain grades can be a first indication that something is wrong. I like to do early interventions that prevent stressful situations down the road. Students sometimes forget to think about what will happen next week or next month. When the consequences of their actions finally catch up to them, they can get very overwhelmed. Preventive measures can be very effective.

There is no one set criteria for how individuals will respond to risks or protective factors for mental health according to the article, *Prevention and early intervention in mental health*, (n.d.). This article outlines four factors to consider; health, safety or security, resources, and relationships. Collaborating with school staff can help evaluate the situation then it will be imperative to have a variety of intervention resources to give parents choices for support.

I found *Prevention and early intervention in mental health- puberty to early adulthood*, (n.d.) to be especially informative because I believe in a holistic approach to mental health and this article expands on that approach. When considering health issues as they relate to mental health there are several factors to consider such as sleep, substance abuse, and physical activity. It is important to understand what questions to ask parents to help them discover the root cause of mental health issues.

Harvard Health, (2021) states, “Sleep problems are particularly common in patients with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).” Understanding these basic principals can help me to ask good questions about students who are struggling with these issues and help to connect them to the right resources and sleep strategies to minimize negative mental health.

Improving the quality of mental health services is dependent on several factors. Ongoing education on this subject is very important and should include reading new research. Another way to improve service is to make sure that we are taking care of ourselves. Being a school counselor is a big responsibility that can be very stressful and drain our energy. All of the advice that we give to students should be things that we put into practice ourselves. Proper food, exercise, and healthy habits will help to keep our minds in a space to be able to help others. Taking a holistic approach to mental health can be very effective because it addresses social,

emotional, and organic sources of mental health instability or contributing factors. I like to empower parents and students to be in charge of their own mental health and understand how their mind and body work. By educating parents and students to be in charge of their own mental health the results are more sustainable. Students will have tools in their toolbelt whenever a crisis occurs.

References

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