INTERVIEW WITH DR. HOBSON

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QUESTION 1

What are some common mental health challenges you see in students as a result of social media use?

Dr. Hobson

So some mental health challenges that I see that I really loved in your presentation yesterday:

1. Comparisons that lead to body image challenges, which at times can lead into eating disorders.

2. Low self confidence and self esteem that affect mental health

3. Increased levels of stress or anxiety due to feelings of fear of missing out (FOMO) or feeling like their level of competence isn't the same as their peers, or they feel like they're not where they need to be because of the inaccurate perception that's portrayed on social media.

4. Another area is sleep challenges that can, at times, lead to mental health challenges and or exacerbate mental health challenges.

QUESTION 2

When students have been negatively impacted by social media, what initial steps do you recommend they take to start feeling better?

Dr. Hobson

I think it's important to state my role at Sierra Canyon, as well as my profession. So, I'm an occupational therapist by trade, and then I'm the wellness director here at Sierra Canyon. I received my doctorate in helping individuals develop healthy habits and routines by educating them and then helping them implement healthy skills, habits and routines. So with that being said, how I'm going to answer that question is based on my background.

So when I was working at USC, I had one student come to me and say, "I'm gonna stop using social media completely". And I feel like some people may take that and say, "okay, great, let's do that". But what I did in that situation, and what I sometimes do now, being at Sierra Canyon, I will say, "Okay, let's make a pros and a cons list. What are some of the pros of social media, and what are some of the cons of social media? And if you were to completely stop social media, how could you get some of those pros in other areas? Or is it about moderation with social media, so you still get some of your pros and you decrease some of your cons". So a pros and cons list.

Also thinking about balance and going back to moderation. So whether that's using screen time trackers or an accountability partner, it's important to recognize that sometimes it's about balance and using skills and strategies to figure out how to make that balance.

The third thing that I'd like to say about this is, tracking. So not just going on screen time and looking to see how often you're on social media- actually every single time, just for a week, or if you feel like you can't do it for a week, just a few days- track on a piece of paper, or on your notes app, when you are on that social media app and how long you're on it. What I find is that when you're actively tracking, opposed to screen time tracking, you become more aware. And just through awareness, you start to become very self sufficient at limitng, and gain that skill of living a more balanced life.

QUESTION 3

How can students rebuild their self esteem if it's been damaged by social media content or interactions on social media?

Dr. Hobson

This is a great question. So, never underestimating the impact of a visual cue. And what I mean by that is a visual cue such as writing affirmations that trigger a healthy emotion within you. We want to trigger our healthy emotions, because emotions are very closely connected to our memory in our brain. So if that's the case, then we start to then remember these feelings, or are more inclined to do them. So what that looks like, practically, is if you have an expo marker and you have a mirror that you feel comfortable

writing affirmations on, that you can see every single day when you get up or every single time when you go to bed, seeing a visual affirmation written down somewhere right when you wake up and right before you go to sleep can be helpful on enhancing your self esteem.

Another strategy is journaling. So, journaling right before you go to sleep, or journaling right when you wake up, to stimulate your brain and fire the neurons to think affirmations, opposed to thinking negative thoughts that decrease your self esteem. This is because sometimes our brain is wired to think negatively at times or lower our self esteem. So, you want to start training your brain, just like you would train in any sport, train your brain to automatically think affirmations, healthy-self-esteem-boosting thoughts.

Another thing that I wanted to say for boosting self esteem is meditation. The reason why I want to say this is because meditation isn't about controlling your thoughts. It's more about taking a moment to pause and to observe your thoughts. If we train our brains to observe our thoughts, then we're able to recognize when we have thoughts that are negatively impacting self esteem and instead implement affirmations. But we need to take that moment to pause people to become aware of these thoughts. Sometimes people think that these negative thoughts are, "the normal way of thinking", and "the only way of thinking", because they've thought like that for so long. But when we take a moment to pause through meditation, or through a different technique like meditation, then we have more awareness to actually implement different thought patterns.

QUESTION 4

What advice do you give to students who are struggling with body image issues due to social media comparisons or just in general?

Dr. Hobson

Yeah, I think that goes back to the first question as well. With body image, at times, it has to do with your thought patterns and the way that you're thinking, and also your habits and your routines. So it may be about modifying your

morning routine. So reflecting, "What does your morning routine look like? Does it look like you're just going through the day and that these thoughts are happening and you're not even noticing them? Are they a part of your normal daily routine?"

If so, let's see how we can embed a coping skill to truly show self care and self love for yourself in the morning, to set the tone for the day, and to rewire the neurons that are going in your mind to not just fire and wire in a way where they're thinking low-self-esteem thoughts that are on autopilot, but you're disrupting them and replacing them with a mindful thought that is actually uplifting your self esteem and then your body image as well.

Another thing too is recognizing the impact of different healthcare professionals, whether it's teaching them and their families about the impact of a therapist that can really get into the root of these thoughts and how they came to occur, manifested and are still reoccurring. The impact of a registered dietitian as well. The impact of seeing their pediatrician and building that close connection with them. And then going back to my role here, thinking about the different habits and routines that may be impacting their body image. So whether that's their exercise routines, their eating routines, their dressing routines, their hair care routines. Because with different body image issues and potential eating disorders/weight loss, hair may be involved as well, as hair loss. So, there's just so many different routines that may be impacted and looking at those and cultivating healthier ways that are more aligned with their long term goals for body image.

"Clothes" is actually a huge one now that I mention it, because all the things that I'm saying are true. I remember there are times where, because we're in a school, we sometimes have to have different uniforms, for example in sports. And for different reasons, people may not feel comfortable. So whether that's working with the coaches to make sure that students feel comfortable in their uniforms, or working with the parents as well to make sure the student feels supported. It's very nuanced at times. That's why habits and routines are really, really important to look at.

How can students recover from, or work to recover from, the anxiety or stress caused by constantly checking social media?

Dr. Hobson

Yeah, it's a great question. And for everyone, it's going to be different, right. Depending on the severity, depending on so many different factors.

There's so many different ways but this is one thing I want to highlight. Within my profession, I'm taught that if you are to take away an unhealthy habit, you replace it with a healthy habit. And I think that's often forgotten, and let's just say, the addiction world, where people are like, "Oh, I'm gonna stop smoking", or "I'm going to stop, (and this is in severe cases) stop drinking". But in response it's like, okay, well, that was a routine, that was a habit, that was time spent doing something so how are you going to now replace that time with something that's healthy. Instead of just saying, "Don't do that".

So, in this case, with anxiety and stress, that takes up time too. So now, its important to think about what you are going to replace that anxiety and that stress with? Instead of just thinking about certain things that cause stress or cause anxiety, or doing things that cause that stress anxiety, what can you replace it with? So I have a list of different coping skills, and I ask students from this very extensive long list to highlight the ones that they feel that they could do or that they've tried that have been beneficial for them to replace the act of stressing, or the act of having anxiety, or anything that they've felt inclined to do that was unhealthy, and then they'll start to reap benefits from doing the healthy coping skill, opposed to engaging in the unhealthy coping skill.

So some people don't recognize that stress and anxiety are, at times, different activities that people engage in, but it's a similar principle on replacing it with something that's healthy. It's actually a principle that was in a book called, The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg. And that's what it talks about in that book.