



Balancing Academics and Serious Illness

Number of Credits: 2

Course Instructors: Miriam Woods, Leo Petersen and Jordan Mix

Course Description: When someone is diagnosed with a serious health condition, priorities can drastically change. But being so focused on coping – or in some cases, just surviving – doesn’t mean education must fall to the wayside. For some students, school can be a refuge—a place where life goes on as before. For others, worries about an illness they, or a loved one, is facing may result in changes in behavior and their ability to handle schoolwork, and relationships with peers. Illness of a student or their family member also poses challenges for educators who are trying to find a balance between comforting the student while still focusing on teaching an entire class, wondering how to respond to behavioral changes, and respecting privacy concerns of the student and family while still answering students’ questions and handling communication with the larger school community. How teachers and other school staff respond at this difficult time can make an enormous difference in the life of a student who is navigating a serious illness.

This course helps participants identify the roles educators can play in supporting students coping with a serious illness, situations in which the classroom curriculum may need to be adjusted, and particular aspects of child development and temperament that affect how a child may understand and cope with illness. This course also offers practical suggestions that educators can implement in their work with students coping with illness, as well as provide strategies for communicating more effectively with both parents and students. Educators can play a key role in nurturing these students, helping bolster their natural resilience, monitoring them for behavioral or academic challenges and working with the parents to help support the students.

Learning Objectives: Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand barriers that serious illness can impose on students
- Gain implementation strategies educators can utilize in their work with students coping with serious illness
- Consider how to effectively communicate with parents and students
- Demonstrate an understanding of the barriers and advantages of school for students coping with serious illness
- Demonstrate a knowledge of ways to build support for students as an educational team

Resources: No texts are required to purchase in order to complete this course

- The mission of Iowa Safe Schools is to provide safe, supportive and nurturing learning environments for all students. Staff of the Iowa Safe Schools are experts in the fields of bullying prevention and intervention, developing positive school climate, and advocating for underrepresented populations. GSAs are shown to be a best practice for increasing awareness of discriminatory school policies, reducing bullying, reducing deaths by suicide, and ensuring students feel safe and supported in their schools and communities.
- Schwartz, Kyle. *I Wish My Teacher Knew* Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2016.
This book offers supportive, practical advice, including: what to tell children about their parent's illness, how to recognize early-warning signs in a child's drawings, sleep patterns, schoolwork and eating habits, and when and where to get professional help.
- McCue, Katherine *How to Help Children Through a Parent's Serious Illness: Supportive, Practical Advice from a Leading Child Life Specialist*. Griffin Publishing, 2012.
This book demonstrates the need for educators to understand the unique realities their students face in order to create an open, safe and supportive place in the classroom.

Course Requirements: To receive full credit for the course, participants must complete ALL assignments and respond to specific questions outlined in each assignment. Failure to complete all assignments will result in a disqualification in the course and a failing grade.

Other Course Information:

Getting Started

- After registering for the course, you will be sent an email with the website address, pass word and course key you need to access your online course, along with login instructions.
- Access each assignment through the course home page. All assignments will be submitted through the Moodle platform on each respective assignment page.
- Please save a backup copy of all course assignments and completed work.

Participation

- You are not required to be present (i.e. online) specific days or times. You will work at your own pace. The course is structured in 3 Weekly Units, however all assignments will not be due until the final day of the course.
- All responses will be posted online. Large documents, files, photographs or PowerPoint presentations may be attached as part of your response by using the "Submit A File" option.
- You may work collaboratively and submit similar responses on all assignments except for quizzes which must be done individually.

INTASC Standards that are addressed in this course:

- 2. The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development.
- 3. The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

- 4. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving and performance skills.
- 5. The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
- 6. The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.
- 7. The teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.
- 9. The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professional in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.
- 10. The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.

Check the Iowa Teaching Standards that are addressed in this course:

X	1. Enhance Student Achievement		5. Monitoring Student Learning
	2. Content Knowledge	X	6. Classroom Management
X	3. Planning and Preparation	X	7. Professional Growth
X	4. Instructional Strategies	X	8. Professional Responsibilities

Assignment Checklist

Topic/Activity	In Class	Out of Class
Getting to Know the Class; Additional Readings: Take the time to get to know the class layout, read over the Help section, and review any other materials present in the class to get started. Take your time!		3 hrs
<u>Week 1 - Getting Started</u>		
Discussion: Introductions – Participants will introduce themselves to the class and discuss what they hope to get out of it.	1 hrs	2.5 hrs
Quiz: Defining Serious Illnesses? – Participants will learn about the differences between chronic health conditions and serious illnesses, as well as different types of serious illnesses. Participants will take a quiz to assess their understanding.	1 hrs	2 hrs
Discussion: What Does School Mean for Students Coping With Illness – Participants will consider the potential barriers and advantages school can present to students coping with a serious illness.	1hrs	2.5 hrs
<u>Week 2</u>		
Quiz: Mental Health 101 – Participants will learn difference between mental illness and mental health, as well as gain an understanding of common mental health problems. Participants will take a quiz to assess their learning.	1.5hrs	1.5hrs
Discussion: When A Parent Has a Mental Illness – In this discussion, participants will examine possible impacts having a parent with a mental illness can have on students.	1.5hrs	2.5 hrs
Discussion: Supporting Students with Mental Illness – In this lesson, participants will learn about common mental health problems plaguing students, such as anxiety and depression, and also learn to identify warning signs for major depressive disorder and suicidal ideation.	1.5 hrs	2 hrs

Discussion: When Physical Illness Leads to Mental Health Problems – In this discussion, participants will gain an understanding of how serious physical illness, and other trauma, can lead to mental health struggles in students who are coping with them. Participants will discuss warning signs and intervention strategies.	1 hrs	1.5
<u>Week 3</u>		
Discussion: Defining Terminal – Participants will learn the difference between terminal and long-term illness, as well as gain an understanding of common terminal and long-term health problems students might endure.	1 hrs	1.5 hrs
Discussion: Supporting Students with a Terminally Ill Family Member - In this discussion, participants will examine possible impacts having a loved one with a terminal illness can have on students. Participants will discuss how they can best offer support to these students.	1 hrs	2.5 hrs
Discussion: Supporting Students with A Terminal or Long-Term Illness – In this lesson, participants will consider how to best help students balance school and with their illness, and strategize about how to effectively communicate with the student, their parents, and the school community.	2 hrs	3.5 hrs
<u>Week 4</u>		
Discussion: What is the Grieving Process? – In this module, participants will analyze the different ways to classify the grieving process. Participants will learn how everyone grieves differently, and will evaluate how these stages of grief could affect a students’ behavior. They will demonstrate their understanding in a discussion post.	15 hours	30 hours
Discussion: What Does Grief Look Like? – In this module we will be looking at the similarities and differences between the way students grieve at different ages. Participants will review several articles on the different presentations of grief in students with ages ranging from preschool to high school, and will compare and contrast the presentations of grief in these age groups. Participants will share their reflections in a discussion post.		
Discussion: What Makes Grief Worse? – In this module, participants will learn about ACE scores and their effects on mental health and how this concept can keep an individual from fully acknowledging their emotions. The assessment will include taking an ACE score and evaluating how these experiences could affect one’s grieving process.		
<u>Week 5</u>		
Discussion: The Lasting Impacts of Living Through A Pandemic – In this lesson, participants will explore some potential long-lasting effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on students. Participants will examine the detrimental affects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on students beyond direct impacts.		
Discussion: Impacts of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Student Groups – In this lesson, participants will explore some potential long-lasting effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on students. Participants will examine the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on students beyond direct impacts.		
Discussion: Community Grief – Participants will consider what community grief might look like, and supports they might be able to offer. Participants will also use a discussion forum		

to strategize about how they might communicate with their students if a member of their school community or other prominent community figure falls ill and/or passes away.		
Week 6		
Discussion: Working As An Educational Support Team to Support Students – In this lesson, participants will learn about how to form and utilize an educational team to support students who might be coping with a serious illness.		
Discussion: The Importance of Good Communication With Students and Parents – In this lesson, participants will consider the benefits of consistent and clear communication with students and parents who are experiencing a serious illness. Participants will discuss what that communication should look like and work together to gain strategies for implementing said communication with families.		
Discussion: The Importance of Self Care - In this module, participants will evaluate their own self-care practices and consider ways to improve them. Participants will discuss the importance of maintaining their own health and well-being, and how that ultimately benefits the students they serve.		
Final Assignment: For the final assignment, participants will design an implementation plan that they could use in their work. This assignment will require participants utilize the information they have learned in this course.		

Coursework: Participants can earn up to 75 points total for the course. The following table depicts the breakdown of points possible for the required coursework

Activity	Points
10 Discussion Posts (5 Points Each)	50
Final Implementation Plan/Paper	25
Total	75

Grading Scale – Graduate Credit

100-90% (75 - 68 points)	A
89-80% (67 – 60 points)	B
79-70% (59 - 53 points)	C
69-60% (52 - 45 points)	D
59%-Below (<45 points)	F

Grading Scale - License Renewal Credit

100-80% (75 - 56 points)	P
79%-Below (<56 points)	NP

Student Requirements Students are required to:

- Participate in **ALL** discussion forums and quizzes
- Complete a final implementation plan

Americans with Disabilities Act: If you are a student with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services, or other accommodations for this class, please see the instructor to discuss your accommodation needs.

Statement of Plagiarism: Academic dishonesty results in failure of this course. Give credit where credit is due. Use the APA Publication Manual to cite references when needed. Not crediting ideas or words of others is unacceptable scholarship as is submitting work that was done for a previous course or that is not your own origin in design or completion. Submit original assignments. Do not submit work for this course that you have done for other courses.

Grading Rubrics for Individual Activities

10 Discussions (50 points possible) Discussion Forums are asynchronous ways to engage in class discussions. They require you to submit an answer to a question and respond to the posts of other peers. Because they are an integral part of sharing strategies, analyzing research, and sharing ideas, discussion forums in this course comprise a significant percentage of your final grade. It's highly recommended that you read and respond to more than the required two peer postings because greater participation will facilitate a greater depth of understanding. Additionally, it's important to make posts in a timely manner to benefit from peer responses.

Grading Rubric for Discussion Forums		
		Points
Critical Thinking	Makes connections to the other content and real-life that are supported by reference(s) and example(s)	1
	Offers new ideas, connections, or applications	1
	Expresses and justifies personal opinion	1
Assignment Specific Criteria	Addresses all parts of the assignment, cites sources	1
Participation (Responses to at least 2 peer posts)	Responds to other posts (when available)	1
Total Points Possible		5

Final Assignment (25 points possible)

The final assignment is a critical part of this course. Participants must complete a two-page final assignment. The paper is meant to be a reflection as well as a chance to state what you will use going forward. The rubric below will be used to grade the final assignment, but additional details will be provided within the course.

Grading Rubric for Implementation Plan		
		Points
Critical Thinking	Highlights any new knowledge gained as a result of course.	5
	Offers new ideas, connections, or applications	5
	Expresses and justifies personal opinion	3
	Discusses Overall Implications	2
Assignment Specific Criteria	Addresses all parts of the assignment, cites sources	2
Mechanics	Writing is clear, well developed, and organized, No or few grammar and spelling errors	2
Implementation	Clearly states ideas to use in the future	2
	States resources to be used	2
	Is realistic in their approach – understands limitations may exist	2
Total Points Possible		25

