



Wellness Today

For Teachers

Warning Signs

Early recognition of someone struggling is key to overcoming challenges. Signs someone may be struggling emotionally include:

- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Mood or behavior changes including appetite and sleep
- Withdrawing or isolating
- Taking excessive risks or behaving recklessly
- Repeated unexplained body aches and pains
- Anxiety interfering with activities
- Frequent anger, irritability, criticizing or tantrums
- Change in academic performance
- Preoccupation with death or dying
- Talking about wanting to die or being a burden

How to Help

While teachers and school personnel are not responsible to counsel at-risk students. They can help by:

1. Knowing the warning signs.
2. Referring students immediately to the school psychologist or counselor. Escorting the student to the school's psychologist or counselor helps with safety and rapport.

Knowledge That Makes a Difference

Each quarter a newsletter will be available with valuable information on ways help your students develop greater emotional wellness, resiliency and skills to handle challenges in life.

Signs of Social Connection Struggles

Students showing signs of difficulty with social connection are at greatest risk of disrupting the learning environment, mental illness and suicide. Through explicit teaching students can improve social skills and social connection. Signs of a lack of social skills include, but are not limited to:

- Difficulty making/maintaining friendships
- Behaving as a class clown
- Being overly protective of relationships
- Difficulty sharing friends/jealous over friendships
- Teasing/antagonizing others
- Making Inappropriate comments
- Younger ages: playing alone or parallel
- Isolating or sitting by self
- Acting as a poor winner or loser
- Sharing unrealistic stories and experiences
- Seeking to top others, be better or win every time
- Behaving overly animated, dramatic or sensational
- Showing emotions incongruent with situations
- Navigating environment in an awkward or odd manner
- Lashing out when feeling betrayed or not given full attention by others
- Seeking negative attention or doing something inappropriate then look around to see who is watching

Developing Social Connection

No matter ones age developing healthy social connections is a vital part and a protective factor of a healthy life. Youth in the US are considered to be the loneliest in the world. Loneliness is the feeling of inadequate social connection.

Having social connection not only improves quality of life but also strengthens mental health by increasing feelings of belonging, purpose, confidence, reducing levels of stress and decreases risk of suicide.

How To Get Help

If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally or behaviorally support is available. Begin by talking with a medical doctor or a mental health professional.

Below are resources available in the community to help:

- **Hope Squad** provides resources for parents on talking with children and teens about suicide and mental health, and practical guidance for accessing help. For more information regarding prevention, intervention and postvention visit www.hopesquad.com
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** offers information regarding mental health conditions and support groups for families. www.nami.org
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** (English and Spanish) 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress. 1-800-273-8255
- **Crisis Text Line** is the free, 24/7, confidential text message service for people in crisis. Text HOME to 7417414

Beginning in elementary school the development of social connection is facilitated through learning cooperative engagement, turn taking, joining in activities, politeness, handling feelings and forming friendships. As students progress through the academic grades peer approval increasingly shape social connection. Helping peers relate in healthy ways and discover commonalities can aid in the development of social connection and feelings of belonging. Some individuals will naturally “get” the skills to build social connection, while others require explicit teaching.

Teachers can help students learn to develop friendships by thinking about

the qualities a friend has. By focusing on these qualities students behaviors begin to be shaped. Having the opportunity to practice interacting in small groups often provides a setting for students to relate more. Typically having the same partners for at least 4 weeks is needed to facilitate the development of a connection between individuals.

For more resources and lesson plans to aid in the development of social skills visit Concordia University-Portland’s website.

<https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/resources-for-social-skills-lesson-plans-for-elementary-students/>.

Self Care - Managing Stress

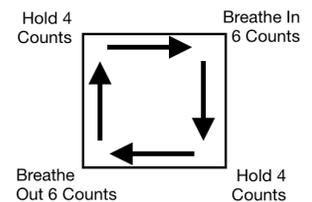
Practicing self care daily helps maintain physical and mental health.

Relaxation Breathing

When stressed or overwhelmed the brain needs more oxygen to function well and feel less stressed. Oxygen aids the functioning of the crucial command center of the brain, the frontal lobe, in motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, initiation, judgement, impulse control, and social behavior. In addition, slower, deeper breathing can slow heart rate and stabilize blood pressure, providing other health benefits. There are many types of relaxation breathing strategies. One is square breathing.

In square breathing, while looking at the corner of a square one will breathe in through the nose for 6 counts. The eyes will move to the next corner of the square, holding the breath for 4 counts. Move to the next corner of the square breathing out the mouth

for 6 counts. On the next corner breath will be held for 4 counts.



This is one round. Repeat for 5 rounds, noticing any changes experienced. The more this is practiced, the more the benefits.

*Note - The information is a starting place and might not be effective for every individual or situation. Individual counseling can be helpful in adapting strategies to meet individual needs.

This newsletter is produced by Hope Squad, a school-based peer support team that partners with local mental health agencies. Squad members are trained to watch for at-risk students, provide friendship, identify suicide-warning signs, and seek help from adults. Articles contributed by Jessica Williamson, LCSW, who specializes in mental health treatment of children, teens and adults in her private practice located in Utah.