



Module 3

Connecting School Mental Health Services to Youth in Foster Care



Test Your Knowledge

- The only difference between school mental health and outpatient mental health is the location. **(T/F)**
- School mental health services are only available to children with special education needs or mental health diagnoses. **(T/F)**
- Most children experience some degree of mental health issues. **(T/F)**
- School mental health services are primarily concerned with diagnosing and treating mental health issues. **(T/F)**
- School mental health services can improve access to mental health services for children in foster care. **(T/F)**



Lesson Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Define school mental health and understand the services provided by school mental health programs.
- Identify children who could be served in school mental health programs.
- Discuss three advantages of school mental health.
- Understand how school mental health is relevant for children in foster care.



Brainstorming Activity

- What is School Mental Health, and what are its advantages?



Why Provide Mental Health in Schools?

- Most children experience some degree of mental health issues (e.g., anxiety about school performance, unhealthy peer pressure, grief and bereavement, depression, etc.).
- Mental health issues affect students' school performance and engagement.
- Though 20% to 38% of American youth have diagnosable mental health disorders, only a small percentage of these youth receive treatment.
- Schools provide a natural and convenient setting for addressing mental health issues.



Small or Large Group Activity

- Take five minutes to brainstorm how school mental health relates to children in foster care.

What is School Mental Health?

- School mental health clinicians provide a full continuum of mental health services for students, and are based within a school setting.
- The goal of school mental health is to work collaboratively with all members of the school community to improve students' educational success and social-emotional wellbeing.

What Mental Health Services are Provided at Schools?

- Assessment
- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Family therapy
- Classroom prevention
- Small group prevention
- Psychiatrist consultation
- Crisis management
- Teacher & staff consultation
- Consultation with outside providers
- School-wide mental health promotion
- After school enrichment & recreational activities

Who Provides School Mental Health Services?

- Either school employees or providers who are employed by an outside agency (hospital, outpatient mental health center).
- School mental health clinicians have various training and backgrounds (e.g., social workers, psychologists, school counselors, and licensed clinical practicing counselors).
- Often, several professionals at the school building provide school mental health services to students and ideally these individuals collaborate and work as a team.

Who is Served?

- Services provided to children in regular and special education
- Preschool through 12th grade
- Presenting problems range from typical developmental issues to more severe behavioral disorders



Case Study: Jacob

- Imagine that in a team meeting, you hear about a student named Jacob (SEE NEXT SLIDE).
- Work with a partner to discuss how to proceed with this student. More specifically, discuss your thoughts about the appropriateness of referring Jacob for school mental health.



Case Study: Jacob

- Jacob is a 6th grade student at a middle school and has been in the foster care system for over one year. He was placed in foster care during 5th grade because his father is in prison for violating his probation by stealing a car. Unfortunately, Jacob's mother passed away when he was two years old. Although Jacob has experienced many difficult situations, his 5th grade teachers said that he is well-adjusted, intelligent, and a "star student." At the beginning of 6th grade, Jacob's teachers report that he is not completing class work or homework. Some of the teachers think he just needs to adjust to middle school and the larger workload; however, one of the teachers thinks that Jacob may need to "talk to someone."

Why is School Mental Health Important for Youth in Foster Care?

- Children in foster care have a high risk of developing mental health issues.
 - 54% had > 1 mental health problems
 - 25% had PTSD
- Children in foster care experience difficulty accessing mental health services (e.g., transportation/distance issues, wait lists, stigma)
- School mental health services can help to address some of the access issues faced by children and adolescents in foster care.



Brainstorming Activity

- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of school mental health services. Brainstorm about ways that children in foster care might benefit from the available options. Think about the range of services that can be provided (e.g., assessment, prevention, or treatment).

Advantages of School Mental Health for Youth in Foster Care

- Provides on-site services (can walk-in)
- Reduces stigma by providing services within school setting. (Since clinician is involved in prevention *and* intervention activities, connection with a provider doesn't necessarily indicate that child is in treatment).
- Allows frequent and regular communication with teachers to discuss academic and socio-emotional difficulties.
- Increase child's sense of school connectedness.
- Allows coordination of community and educational resources for children.

Disadvantages of School Mental Health for Youth in Foster Care

- Sessions may interfere with academic time. Address this issue by pulling children from non-academic classes, having shorter sessions (20-30 minutes), and/or rotating schedules so the same class is not always interrupted.
- Students are seen during school day and therefore without parent/guardian present. However, regular contact with parents and guardians is necessary and strongly encouraged.
- In the event of a school transfer, the student would need to transfer to a new school mental health clinician (if the services were available).



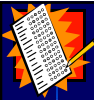
Moving Towards Action Activity

- Pair off and create a sheet of questions to use to inquire about what mental health services and other forms of student support (e.g. Student Support Teams) might be available in a school, as well as the steps required to link the child or adolescent with those services. **Answers will vary here depending on the school system.**
- **Additional Optional Activity:** Discuss how you would help a child or adolescent get connected with a school mental health clinician.



Retest Your Knowledge


- 1) The difference between school mental health and outpatient mental health is the location. **(False)**
 - **Explanation:** The goal of school mental health is to become a vital part of the school culture, and to reach *all* children, teachers, and administrators at the school by providing universal and prevention activities as well as more targeted intervention services.



Re-Test Your Knowledge (cont'd)

2) School mental health services are only available to children with special education needs or mental health diagnoses. **(False)**

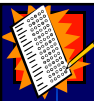
- **Explanation:** Children of all ages and grades who are in regular or special education can participate.



Re-Test Your Knowledge (cont'd)

3) Most children experience some degree of mental health issues. **(True)**


- **Explanation:** Most children experience some degree of mental health issues. About 20% to 38% of youth in the United States have diagnosable mental health disorders.



Re-Test Your Knowledge (cont'd)

4) School mental health services are primarily concerned with diagnosing and treating mental health issues. **(False)**

- **Explanation:** School mental health services range from classroom and school-wide prevention activities and group counseling to more targeted diagnosis and treatment for individual mental health issues. Moreover, mental health services are utilized by children with a range of concerns from typical developmental issues (e.g., peer relationships, healthy identity development) to severe behavioral disorders (e.g., Major Depressive Disorder, Conduct Disorder).




Re-Test Your Knowledge (cont'd)

5) School mental health services can improve access to mental health services for children in foster care. **(True)**


- **Explanation:** Provides on-site services in the most convenient and natural setting possible!

Practical Resources



- **Advocating in School for the Children in Your Care**
http://www.nfpainc.org/uploads/Advocating_in_School_for_the_Children_in_Your_Care.pdf
This brief article from the National Foster Parent Association and Casey Family Programs is aimed towards foster parents, and gives tips on how to become educational advocates for the foster children and youth in their care.
- **Educational Advocacy Curriculum**
http://www.nfpainc.org/uploads/EDUCATIONAL_ADVOCACY.pdf
This training encourages and prepares foster parents to become educational advocates for the foster children and youth in their care. It is designed for foster parents and social workers.
- **Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit**
http://www.nctsn.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_cwtool
The Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit is designed to teach basic knowledge, skills, and values about working with children who are in the child welfare system and who have experienced traumatic stress.

Practical Resources



- **School Mental Health.org:**
www.schoolmentalhealth.org
This website provides information and fact sheets on children's mental health for providers, educators, families and youth. Specific information about mental health for youth in foster care is also available at this site.
- **Casey Family Programs:**
<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/MentalHealthReview.htm>
Published in 2006, this review surveys major findings gleaned from studies about the evidence base for mental health care and about related class action law suits. The review also outlines steps that will improve the mental health services delivered to children and youth in foster care.
<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/EndlessDreams.htm>
The Endless Dreams video showcases the great potential of schools to support and enrich the lives of youth in care. The video features a young woman in care and describes how life in foster care impacts her education. Casey Family Programs offers this 15 minute video upon request at no charge. For a copy of the video, please send e-mail to contactus@casey.org.

Acknowledgements

- Funding for this project was supported by: Maryland Mental Health Transformation Grant # 5 U79SM57459-02 from SAMH
- The Center for School Mental Health is supported in full by Project #U45 MC 00174 from the Office of Adolescent Health, Maternal, and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act), Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services.