



Module 6

School Mental Health and Foster Care: A Public Health Perspective



Test Your Knowledge

- All children in foster care can benefit from receiving mental health promotion, prevention and/or treatment services. **(T/F)**
- If I think a child in foster care is having emotional difficulties, I should wait a few months to refer the child for mental health services because he/she probably just needs time to adjust. **(T/F)**
- Schools readily have a list of students in their building who are currently in the foster care system that is available for mental health providers. **(T/F)**
- Individuals who work with children in foster care should be of the same racial, ethnic, and cultural background to ensure that they are culturally competent to work with the children. **(T/F)**



Lesson Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Be knowledgeable about the 3-tiered public health model and be able to determine which level of mental health service the child or adolescent needs.
- Be familiar with how to refer children and adolescents in foster care for mental health services in schools.
- Be familiar with strategies for implementing programs and evidenced-based treatments for children and adolescents in foster care.
- Be knowledgeable about cultural competency and the importance of being culturally sensitive in working with children from different backgrounds.



Brainstorming Activity

- Discuss and make a list of the unique mental health needs of children in foster care.

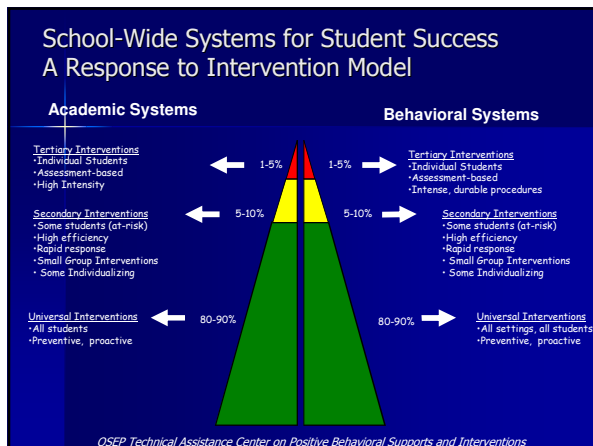


Symptoms of Mental Health Problems

- Many symptoms of mental health problems may be misidentified (e.g., laziness, lack of interest, delinquency).
- These maladaptive coping skills may have developed in order for children to handle more serious underlying mental health problems.
- For example:
 - Depression manifest in the classroom as sleeping in class, refusal to participate, not turning in homework assignments and failing class
 - Signs of anxiety may include failing grades, frequent absences and excessive worry about grades and performance
 - School avoidance and difficulty concentrating may be signs of unresolved trauma.

Do All Youth in Foster Care Need Mental Health Services?

- The public mental health tertiary model provides us with direction for what types of services children will need.
 - 80-90% of children need *universal services*. These prevention services are meant to be proactive. The goal is to promote mental health and positive well-being. E.g., Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS).
 - 5-10% of children need *secondary services*. These services are provided to children who are at-risk for mental health difficulties. The goal is to provide services to these children before they deteriorate and require more intensive services. E.g., small groups such as elementary social skills group, middle school transitions group, self-esteem building group, etc.
 - 1-5% of children need *tertiary services*. These services are provided to children who meet criteria for a mental health disorder and/or require more intensive services. E.g., Individual therapy



- ### Universal Services
- All children benefit!
 - These services benefit youth at risk for developing mental health disorders may be especially helpful for youth in foster care.
 - For children in foster care, they should receive at minimum universal services and/or secondary services.
 - The best option is to provide children with universal (prevention) services before their emotional and behavioral functioning deteriorates.

- ### Evidence Based Practices from a Public Mental Health Perspective
- Universal prevention programs
 - Programs that improve school climate and behavioral outcomes at systems levels.
 - One example is Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)
 - Juvenile Justice/Special Education (JJ/SE) Shared Agenda that establishes a trauma sensitive school culture. E.g., Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Turnaround for Children, the Sanctuary Model of Organizational Change for Children's Residential Treatment.
 - Extracurricular activities (art, music, sports, drama, chess)

- ### Evidence Based Practices from a Public Mental Health Perspective (cont.)
- Secondary programs
 - Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)
 - Support groups focused on school connectedness, self esteem, improving academic performance, and/or social skills.

- ### Evidence Based Practices from a Public Mental Health Perspective (cont.)
- Tertiary programs
 - Therapeutic foster care
 - Intensive case management and wraparound services
 - Multisystemic therapy (MST)

- ### List of Evidence Based Programs
- [http://csmh.umaryland.edu/resources.html/Summary%20of%20Recognized%20Evidence%20Based%20Programs6.14.08.doc](http://csmh.umaryland.edu/resources/html/Summary%20of%20Recognized%20Evidence%20Based%20Programs6.14.08.doc)

How to Promote Positive Mental Health for Youth at School

- Inquire about the names of the mental health staff at school and other non-school hired counselors through other agencies.
- Create a resource list for the schools in your region and update the list as new staff is hired.
 - Make it standard practice to provide the resource list of mental health staff to foster care parents when a child enrolls in a new school.



Brainstorming Activity

- Brainstorm some ideas for some best practices to overcome the barriers around early identification and intervention for school mental health services. Focus your ideas on how to better reach out to youth in foster care in schools and more effectively make referrals and obtain consent for services.

How Do I make a Referral For Mental Health Services?

- No firm guidelines currently exist.
- Best practice currently suggests that parents and guardians for children in foster care as well as teachers and school staff should be mindful of the mental health warning signs at home and at school and make appropriate referrals if any concerns persist.
- Foster parents and guardians enrolling children in schools should take the time to connect to school mental health professionals if they believe that services would be helpful for their student, especially in the school setting.
- Ask to make a referral for mental health services early!

More About the Referral Process...

- Help students in foster care learn how to advocate for their needs.
- The process for making a school mental health referral varies across jurisdictions and even across schools.
- Referral procedures also differ based on whether the referral is to a school employed staff or to a school-based community provider. Many community programs have their own referral forms that can be distributed to teachers, parents and guardians.

Obtaining Consent for Services

- Obtaining consent for children in foster care to receive mental health services in school can be a challenging process!
- Be aware of who has the legal authority to provide consent for the child to receive services.
- School-based clinicians typically require consent for services.
- It is very important for schools to have the most up-to-date contact information in order to contact parents and guardians as needed
 - Hint: Child welfare caseworkers are often the best source for the most up to date information for each child on their caseload.

Strategies to Ensure a Successful Referral

- Request a release of information from child welfare caseworkers as a standard procedure when registering a child in school.
- Provide information to parents/guardians on available school-based counseling services/prevention services as a regular part of the standard school registration process for all incoming students.
- Empower families/guardians to find out more information about the mental health services at school.

More Strategies to Ensure a Successful Referral

- Encourage families/guardians to always provide up to date contact information for students.
- Clinicians should share information on warning signs of mental health concerns and information on when and how to refer students for mental health services.



Brainstorming Activity

- Provide the group with the various statements below and have groups discuss the competency around these statements.
 - You don't know what its like to be poor.
 - You're the wrong color to help these kids
 - Male therapists shouldn't work with girls who have been sexually abused.
 - How can a woman understand a male student's problems?
 - I never feel that young professionals can be trusted.
 - Social Workers (nurses/MD's psychologists/teachers) don't have the right training to help these kids.
 - If you haven't had alcohol or other drug problems, you can't help students with such problems.
 - If you don't have teenagers at home, you can't really understand them.

Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them become what they are capable of being.

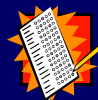
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Diversity of Youth in Foster Care

- Children and adolescents in foster care are from all different races, ethnicities, and cultures.
- Differences can result in problems for students, parents, and staff. Although such problems are not easily resolved, they are solvable as long as everyone works in the best interests of the students, and the differences are not allowed to become barriers to relating with others.

Developing Cultural Competency

- Enhance your competence with respect to the group and its intragroup differences.
- Developing such competence is a dynamic, on going-process- not a goal or outcome.
- Diversity training is widely viewed as important, but is not effective in isolation.
- Hiring staff from the same back ground as a target population does not necessarily ensure the provision of appropriate services.
- Establishing a process for enhancing a program's competence with respect to group and intragroup differences is an opportunity for positive organizational and individual growth.



Retest Your Knowledge

- 1) All children in foster care can benefit from receiving mental health promotion, prevention and/or treatment services. (True)

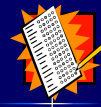
Explanation: Based on the public mental health perspective, all children and adolescents can benefit from universal prevention services.



Retest Your Knowledge

- 2) If I think a child in foster care is having emotional difficulties, I should wait a few months to refer the child for mental health services because he/she probably just needs time to adjust. (False)

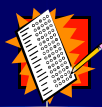
Explanation: Many children, including those in foster care, are not referred for mental health services until they are displaying clinically significant levels of problem behavior. The best option is to provide children with universal (prevention) services before their emotional and behavioral functioning deteriorates.



Retest Your Knowledge

- 3) Schools readily have a list of students in their building who are currently in the foster care system that is available for mental health providers. (False)

Explanation: Due to privacy laws, schools do not possess a list of students who are in the foster care system. To work around this issue, best practice currently suggests that parents and guardians as well as teachers and school staff should be mindful of the mental health warning signs at home and at school and make appropriate referrals if any concerns persist. Foster parents, guardians, and/or social workers enrolling children in schools should take the time to connect to school mental health professionals if they believe that prevention, early intervention or treatment services might be helpful for the student.



Retest Your Knowledge

- 4) Individuals who work with children in foster care should be of the same racial, ethnic, and cultural background to ensure that they are culturally competent to work with the children. (False)

Explanation: Hiring staff from the same background as a target population does not necessarily ensure the provision of appropriate services, especially if those staff do not fully appreciate or respect group and intragroup differences. Establishing a process for enhancing an individual or program's cultural competence is the best strategy to ensure competent and respectful care.

Practical Resources



- *School Mental Health.org:*
www.schoolmentalhealth.org
- *Baltimore City Public Schools School Mental Health Directory:*
- *Can be accessed at*
www.schoolmentalhealth.org (see directory section on left hand side)

Practical Resources



- *Moving toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

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