

How can we best support student mental well-being?

Anxiety and depression are among the most common mental health issues experienced by young people today. Experts overwhelmingly agree that daily stress management and physical activity can reduce these issues, including for students with autism, ADHD, eating and psychotic disorders, and schizophrenia. This combination of coping skills and exercise can be a reliable alternative to the exclusive use of antidepressants and other medications, and should be included in the mental health services offered to students in schools.

Maintaining positive mental health can prevent the onset of anxiety and depression

While there's no single cause linked to anxiety and depression, educators can focus on promoting the following factors of positive youth mental health that we know will strengthen students' coping skills when faced with stressful situations:

- Positive self-esteem
- Lifestyles that include physical activity, healthy eating habits and quality sleep
- Harmonious family relations
- Supportive school environments that are conducive to learning
- Positive student-teacher relations

Developing a sense of self-efficacy maintains positive mental health

The most crucial component for students to maintain mental wellness is their perceived ability to accomplish challenging goals and tasks. This sense of self-efficacy goes hand-in-hand with self-regulation, which is our ability to deal with and recover from stressful situations using the following steps:

1. Identifying undesirable feelings, whether they be physical, mental and/or emotional
2. Identifying the root cause of the stress
3. Determining what changes can be made to prevent or reduce the stressors
4. Proposing strategies to cope or adapt to the stressful situation or issue
5. Monitoring improvements in the situation

When a young person learns to reframe their thoughts in a more positive light, their actions and emotions will follow suit. For students facing more severe mental health issues, providing them with techniques to heighten their own sense of accomplishment and ability to cope with stressful situations is a more comprehensive approach than drug-based treatments alone. Therefore, providing more well-rounded mental health and wellness support in schools will benefit students well beyond adolescence into adulthood.

For online resources as well as the research references that inform this issue, please visit:

www.cea-ace.ca/facts-on-education

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