

Working with parents to support MH

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Welcome

Parents

- Building positive connections between parents and teachers have been shown to improve children's academic achievement, social competencies, and emotional well-being.
- When parents and educators work as partners, children do better in school and at home.
- It's a lot less stressful working with parents when you have a positive relationship with them.
- We need to build relationships with parents and work positively with them because it will make your life easier and benefit the student.

How Parent Friendly is Your School?

- How welcoming are the signs and reception staff?
- How easy is your PTA or similar to join?
- How accessible is information about your school?
- How do you communicate with parents?
- What types of language do you use in parent communications?
- How often do you contact parents and for what reasons?
- Do you use Dyslexia friendly formats in communications?

Parents Evenings

- Complicated appointment system?
- Welcoming?
- How are invitations sent?
- Educational jargon?
- Reporting on negatives only?
- Purely academic levels?
- Do you do home visits for parents barriers to attending?

Events

- Are they elitist and exclusionary?
- How do you support parents with younger children?
- Do you embrace all talents and abilities?

Why is this important?

Positive communication and relationships are vital for the outcomes of students – particularly around mental health.

Backfire effect.

People do more for people they like.

Simple Techniques

- smile
- learn personal information
- act like you like their child
- listen and validate
- be thankful

Barriers To Positive Relationships

Differing Cultural Beliefs/Attitudes

Consequences of different cultural meanings around mental health:

- affects motivation to see help for mental health
- how symptoms are coped with
- supportiveness of family and community
- where help is sought
- difficulty viewing mental health as a single entity

Reducing Stigma

- education
- contact
- peer support
- protest and advocacy
- legislative and policy change

How can reduce stigma?

- language – e.g. ‘stigma’ or ‘prejudiced discrimination’
- discuss MH in admissions
- run awareness campaigns
- highlight famous people with MH issues
- stimulate discussions
- challenge rigid thinking

Look at how you approach Mental Health in your setting...

- Is there a stigma around MH?
- Do you create regular discussions about mental health and wellbeing?
- Do staff provide positive norms and role models
- Is MH viewed as something only professionals should 'fix'?

Parental Reactions to MH

Denial – my child is fine, there's nothing wrong, it's just attention seeking.

I am going to fix this problem – I'll have a chat with them and stop my child seeing their friends who must be influencing them.

Anger – somebody must be making my child like this or bullying them. What are you doing to sort it out?

Upset – why are they doing this to me? It makes me look like a bad parent.

Failure – I must be such a terrible parent for this to have happened.

Disgust – how could they do this, it'll make me look really bad.

Parental Reactions to MH

- acknowledge how the parent is feeling
- reassure them that it is a normal reaction
- reassure them that there is help available
- advise on how they can help their child

Advice for Parents:

- don't force them to talk, explain you are available if needed or suggest other people they can talk to
- don't be afraid to talk about emotions
- don't tell them how they are feeling is wrong
- don't make them feel guilty because they are upsetting – they already have a low opinion of themselves
- play together/have fun together/socialise together
- don't be tempted to accuse/ban their friends
- liaise with school

Links/Organisations

- <https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/parents-and-carers/supporting-your-child-s-mental-health/>
- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/>
- <http://www.samanthagarner.co.uk/resources.php>

Parent with MH Issues

- may struggle with simple aspects of daily life
- may struggle with emotions around children
- struggle to recognise needs of their child
- engage socially with their child
- may not involve the school because of stigma

Protective Factors

Reduce the risk to child's wellbeing:

- parent able to acknowledge and accept support
- support network to help care for children
- receiving professional advice and support
- children having a trusted adult they can speak to
- community support organisations

How can we help

- do consider if it is a safeguarding issue
- provide access to a mentor/advocate
- involve the parent and child
- set up/access peer groups with children in similar situations
- provide child with age appropriate information about mental health problems
- work with family/support network
- ensure the child knows they are not to blame in anyway
- support the child in continuing everyday routine

Links/Organisations

- <https://ourtime.org.uk/>
- <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/information-for-parents-and-carers/parental-mental-illness-the-impact-on-children-and-adolescents-for-parents-and-carers>

Remember

- We aren't perfect parents ourselves.
- Good enough parenting is good enough.
- We work as a team for the child.

How fortunate we are.....

Recommended Further Reading

Engaging Families in Schools: Practical strategies to improve parental involvement Paperback by Nicola S. Morgan

Why Is My Mommy So Sad?: A Story About Dealing With A Family Member's Depression by Cheryl Wozny

Parenting the New Teen in the Age of Anxiety: A Complete Guide to Your Child's Stressed, Depressed, Expanded, Amazing Adolescence (Parenting Tips, Raising Teenagers, Gift for Parents) by Dr. John Duffy

Research Links

- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6018386/>
- https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2156869320912520#_i16

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