Classroom Mental Health: Wellness Strategies for Students (and Teachers!)
Speakers

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Overview: What do we mean by “Mental Wellness”?

Ross Szabo: Mental Wellness Foundations

Michelle Siryc: Educator Lessons in Mental Wellness

Practices for Educators

Resources for Students
(Re)Defining Mental Health
(Re)Defining Mental Health

**Reactive** - Focused on illness

These words get *way* too much emphasis
(Re)Defining Mental Health

Proactive - Focused on wellness
What is Mental Health?

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.
Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health

Mental health is not a problem. Think of mental health like physical health. You can improve and strengthen them both through your actions.

Focus on Yourself

Taking care of your own mental health is an opportunity to model positive self-care for students and support your own well-being.

Support Your Students

Establish a classroom environment that positively supports mental health and support your students individually when needed.

Combat Stigma

Model positive mental health messaging and habits while actively speaking out against false or misleading understandings of mental health.
Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health

1. Proactive, not reactive
2. It can always be improved
3. “Help” is not a dirty word
Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health  Focus on Yourself

Model good mental health practices, and...

...share your story

vulnerability with control vs vulnerability without control
Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health
- Create a positive learning environment
- Facilitate positive peer relations in class

Focus on Yourself
- Embed mental breaks throughout the day
- Pay attention to the mental well-being of your students

Support Your Students
Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health  Focus on Yourself  Support Your Students

Mental Health Spectrum

- Able to Balance
- Difficult to Balance
- Need Help to Balance
- Needs Constant Assistance to Balance
- Unable to Balance
Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health
- Talk openly about mental health
- Be conscious of language
- Show compassion for those with mental illness
- Encourage equality between physical and mental illness
- Choose empowerment over shame
- Don’t harbor self-stigma

Focus on Yourself

Support Your Students

Combat Stigma

IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY

I'm not Okay

That's Okay
| Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom |

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Michelle Sircy
Counselor Specialist
Jefferson County Public Schools
Learning to be Comfortable with our Discomfort

What challenges do teachers face in feeling well-prepared to talk about mental wellness?

• The Pressure to Know Everything
• Preserving Your Own Mental Health
• Secondary Trauma
Teachers: The First Line of Defense

First and foremost, relationships matter.

Understanding Warning Signs

- Each child is different. A warning sign for one student may not be for another.
- Take note when thoughts, emotions, or behaviors:
  - Last longer than is typical for them
  - Are more intense than usual
  - Or stop them from completing daily tasks as they typically would
Teaching Resilience + Coping Strategies

What are ways to help students cope and take mental health breaks?

• Learning to understand and manage stress
• Seeing warning signs in yourself and others
• Taking breaks from social media
• Teaching breathing techniques
• Offering naturally calming physical spaces
Calming Physical Spaces

• Make the Space
  – Offer dedicated areas for mindfulness in your school or classroom

• Dim the Lights
  – Easy and surprisingly calming

• Set the Tone:
  – Offer visual reminders and cues
Mental Breaks

Classwide Mental Break Ideas

• Breathing Techniques

• Candy Senses Reflection Activity
  – What does it look like?
  – What is the texture like?
  – What does it feel like on your teeth?

• Regular Journaling
The Power of Peers

How can educators empower students to advocate for themselves and others?

• Sources of Strength
Mental Wellness Practices for Educators
Talk Yourself Up

**Positive self-talk** makes you feel good about yourself and the things that are going on in your life. It’s like having an optimistic voice in your head that always looks on the bright side.

*Examples:* ‘I am doing the best I can’, “If I don’t make it through this grading tonight, it’s not the end of the world”

courtesy of Reachout.com
Be Compassionate to Yourself

Imagine a student schedule that looked like this:
• No time to eat, drink or use the bathroom
• No opportunity to connect with friends
• Only focusing on work regardless of what is happening in personal life. (Just get work done- we don’t have time to talk through what is going on!)
• No exercise
• No fun!

Is this an optimal schedule for students?
Bolster Your Mental Health Foundations

Healthy Habits
- Stretch and move once an hour
- Eat lunch!
- Healthy snacks on hand
- Breathe & relax
- Exercise

Emotional Awareness
- Identify emotions
- Practice mindfulness
- Transition intentionally

Positive Relationships
- Offer help
- Ask for help
- Stay positive in the teacher's lounge
- Maintain friendships outside of school

Positive Mindset
- Growth Mindset
- Reframe your thoughts
- Keep things in perspective
- You've got this!
Mental Wellness
Resources for Students
Additional Resources

- **SAMHSA**
  - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
  - Federal resources and links to external resources

- **NIH**
  - National Institute of Mental Health
  - Resources on data, diagnoses, and treatment.

- **JED**
  - Suicide prevention
  - Find help and get involved
Mental Wellness Basics

Grade Level: 8th-10th
Total Lessons: 4 lessons, approximately 40 minutes
Aligns with K-12 National Health Education Standards (NHES) as well as Common Core Literacy Standards (CCSS).

At-a-Glance
We all must work on maintaining mental health especially during challenging times. This course provides learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to build, maintain and promote positive mental health. By helping all students develop a positive mindset, and normalizing the discussion of mental health concerns, this course reduces stigma and empowers students to help themselves and others.

Course Highlights
- Four interactive modules with videos that promote learning through practice.
- Offline activities that allow teachers and students to extend learning as a class or individually.

Course Topics
- Components that lead to mental health
- Strategies that help you cope with challenges
- Seeking treatment for self and others
- Symptoms and causes of mental disorders
Claim Your Account

everfi.com/newteacher

- Find Your State
- Enter Your School
Implementation Support

Your Local Schools Manager

• Support Specific to your District

• Deep Understanding of State Standards Alignment and Regional Usage

• Dedicated Training and Professional Development
Questions for our Panelists?
Mental Wellness Action Steps

Reframe Mental Health

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Support Your Students

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Combat Stigma

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Reframe Mental Health

Mental health is like your physical health.

- **It’s not a problem.** You don’t define your physical health only by diseases; your mental health is not only about mental illness.

- **You can improve it.** Just as you can take actions to improve your physical health, there are actions you can take to improve your mental health.

- **Getting help is no big deal.** If you are physically sick, going to the doctor is a no-brainer. Get treatment and get better. The same goes for your mental health.
Focus on Yourself

Taking care of your own mental health first builds your resilience to handle the challenges in your life and career and gives you the wherewithal to help others.

Model Good Mental Health Practices
- Your students need to see it.
- You can talk about it too.

The same is true for your mental health.
Focus on Yourself - Share Your Story

Sharing the story of your own mental health journey can involve how you have dealt with stress, significant loss or even a mental disorder such as depression. The important thing is to model how to do this effectively.

Vulnerability without control. vs. Vulnerability with control.
Support Your Students

Supporting the mental health of your students can come in many forms. But remember that you are not responsible for someone else’s mental well-being.

In Practice:
- Create a positive learning environment
- Facilitate positive peer relations in class
- Embed mental breaks throughout the day
- Pay attention to the mental well-being of your students
Recognizing Balance

Mental Health Spectrum

- Able to Balance
- Difficult to Balance
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Combat Stigma

Each of these Mental Wellness Action Steps contributes to fighting stigma.

- Combating mental health stigma starts with education and recognition that it is a part of all of our lives.
- Your students may have more experience or familiarity with mental health and mental disorders than you know. It is always good to start with understanding where they are before starting a conversation or unit of study.
- Your modeling of the approach and language you use can help fight stigma in and outside of your class.
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