

Moments for Mental Health

Everyday Strategies for Promoting Positive Mental Health

Refer to Moments for Mental Health under the Embedded Strategies tab at www.everymomentcounts.org



Mental health is a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. (Surgeon General, 1999)

Vision

All school personnel will be mental health promoters. The activities used to promote positive mental health are similar to those we use to prevent mental health challenges or intervene when a person experiences a mental illness. Meaningful and enjoyable activities foster participation in daily life, positive social interaction and a sense of emotional well-being.

Caring Connections

Connect with children/youth in caring ways and encourage them to connect with others. People with strong social relationships are happier and healthier. Close relationships provide meaning, support and a sense of belonging. Doing enjoyable activities together helps people connect.¹

Focus on Strengths

As, or more important than skills and abilities, are a person's unique character strengths – morally desirable traits such as kindness, creativity, courage, persistence, humor, and humility to name a few. Evidence suggests that recognizing and using one's unique character strengths can help promote happiness and mental well-being – and decrease depression and anxiety.² Make a point to help the clients you serve notice, value and use their strengths in their everyday lives.

Promote Positive Emotions: Participation in Enjoyable Activities/Occupations

Help children/youth explore and participate in occupations that are enjoyable. Experiencing positive emotions like joy, inspiration, and pride enhance emotional well-being. Moments of positive emotions can be subtle or fleeting, but can be powerful 'nutrients' in helping people be mentally healthy. How much is enough? Overall, people need to experience more positive emotions than negative ones in a 3-to-1 ratio throughout the day.³

Talk About Mental Health

Make positive mental health a natural part of everyday conversations. Talking about mental health can promote mental health literacy – by helping all persons develop a working knowledge of positive mental health as well the signs of mental illness.^{4,5} Make a point to emphasize that taking care of one's mental health is as important as taking care of one's physical health! Come up with creative ways to teach clients about the 4 characteristics associated with positive mental health⁶ and ways to promote feeling good emotionally: 1) Positive emotions– feeling happy (participate in enjoyable occupations); 2) Positive psychological and social functioning – feeling good about oneself (e.g aware of strengths); getting along with others; having at least 1-2 good friends; 3) Engaging in productive activities – doing well in everyday activities (school, work, play/leisure, rest); and 4) Coping with life stressors – having strategies for dealing with life challenges (e.g. relaxation strategies, thinking positive, etc.).

Move & Be Active

Physical activity and exercise have both short- and long-term effects on mental health. Usually within five minutes of moderate exercise such as walking, there is positive effect on mood. In addition to helping people feel good emotionally, moderate-intensity exercise on a regular basis can help to reduce and prevent anxiety and depression.⁷

Focus on Feelings

Make a point to ask ‘How are you feeling?’ and take time to listen to what your clients have to say. This communicates caring and also helps promote emotional literacy - the ability to identify, understand and respond to emotions in oneself and others in a healthy way. People who have a strong foundation in emotional literacy are mentally healthier and enjoy positive relationships.⁸

Offer Calm Moments: Help Clients Manage Stress

Disability, injury, trauma and illness are significant situational stressors that may lead to anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Learning how to cope with stressful situations and everyday challenges is an important life skill. Relaxation, yoga and mindfulness approaches are found to be promising practices for improving coping abilities and reducing anxiety. Such practices help people to ‘step back’ from stressful situations by teaching them how to purposefully and non-judgmentally ‘be in the moment’.⁹

Think Positive: Promote Positive Self-Talk

Sometimes changing how we think, helps to change how we feel and behave. People who think positive tend to be happier, healthier and cope better during challenging times – but it’s important to be a ‘realistic optimist’. Being a realistic optimist requires being able to put situations in perspective by using thinking skills to help develop a positive outlook. Encourage gratitude (an appreciation of life and the moment) and cultivate optimism. Help the clients think about one or two good things happening at that moment – being mindful of what can be seen, heard or felt that is positive.¹⁰

Foster Kindness

Being kind to others increases levels of happiness in others as well as our own feelings of happiness.¹¹ Kindness is any act of genuine care or thoughtfulness. Acts of kindness help people connect with others in positive, supportive ways. Small, spontaneous acts (e.g. giving a compliment, smiling at someone, including someone who is alone) and larger, planned acts (e.g. volunteering, writing a thank you note) foster thoughtfulness, cooperation and positive feelings about oneself.

Create Positive Environments

Do what you can to create positive physical and social environments to help people feel good emotionally (calm, safe) and physically (comfortable) in order to function successfully. So ‘tune into’ all of the social, physical and sensory aspects of the spaces your clients and families spend time in. For example, the Comfortable Cafeteria and Refreshing Recess programs create positive environments for students to enjoy eating lunch, socializing with peers, and engaging in active play.¹² Think about waiting rooms (clinics, hospitals), patient bedrooms, school classrooms, homes, and dining halls (assisted living and skilled nursing) – how can you help make them more positive places for participation and enjoyment?

References:

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¹²Every Moment Counts: Promoting Mental Health Throughout the Day. <http://www.everymomentcounts.org>