



COUNSELING COL:LAB

Signs your Student Might Benefit from Therapy

Teachers and school administrators are usually the first to detect immediate shifts in a student's participation, conduct, and achievement. *But how do you differentiate between what is normal and what requires outside intervention?*

Beyond familiarizing yourself with the signs your student might benefit from therapy, **effective communication** and collaboration between educators and parents is vital. You may wonder how to approach these delicate topics without making things worse or feel ill-equipped to know what to say.

This resource reviews some helpful tactics for talking with parents and students themselves about all things mental health, and will prepare you for when these situations arise.

It is important to know that while conversations between parents and educators are essential, teachers and school administrators should never advise parents on specific mental health diagnoses or suggest specific prescription medications. That's why it's also important to have on hand some referral sources that you can connect your students with.

[Connect with Counseling Col:lab](#)



Helpful Tips & Signs to Pay Attention To

- Pay close attention to students who have a **change in routines**, retreat from peers, decline in social or academic functioning, somatic complaints, disruptive hyperactivity, excessive sadness, or irritability
- Always assume goodness – children want to be good, being “bad” is a reaction (symptom) of a strenuous situation
- Know the **resources available** at your school if you need to discuss a student’s behavior: principal, nurse, psychologist, or social worker
Set aside time for monthly check-ins with your students
 - This will enhance your relationship with students
 - Understand what each of your students are going through, how they are feeling about it, and what is happening in their lives
 - Students get used to verbalizing their feelings
- Have a functioning knowledge of age-appropriate mental health problems and related symptoms

Commonly diagnosed in children and adolescence:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
 - ▶ Forgetting to start or complete assignments
 - ▶ Classroom disruption
 - ▶ Difficulty maintaining focus
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)
 - ▶ Noncompliance
 - ▶ Irritated or argumentative
 - ▶ Hostile toward authority figures
- Anxiety
 - ▶ Somatic symptoms: stomach pangs, shaking hands or legs, racing heart
 - ▶ Increased absences
 - ▶ Continues to be avoidant toward specific situations
- Depression
 - ▶ Noticeable change in eating patterns
 - ▶ Withdrawal from peers and class activities
 - ▶ Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping in class)



Benefits of Mental Health Therapy for Students

Strengthens **interpersonal techniques** and emotional intelligence

- Form and maintain stronger relationships
- Rise in self-awareness, decision-making skills, self-regulation, emotional regulation, direct communication, empathy, assertiveness, memory, and **confidence**

- Reinforces relationship with parents and siblings

- Improves academic performance
 - Better concentration, productivity, and reduces the amount of absences
- Better **quality of life**
- Reduces suicidal ideation, irritation, behavioral outbursts, and self-destructive behavior
- Feel heard and supported by trusted adults
 - Therapy is a gentle and non-threatening space to inspect their thoughts and feelings
- Learn how to engage in and implement self-care

- Recognize and deal with symptoms
 - Identify **negative or unhealthy thought patterns** and how to handle them
 - Learn how their thoughts influence their temperament and behavior
- Teaches and instills strategies for coping with individualized problems
- Increases resilience and reduces the impact of traumatic events
- Freely discuss partners, sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity
- Discover how to adjust to complex life circumstances or dramatic and sudden changes
- Group therapy offers an opportunity to hear about other students' experiences and receive peer feedback
 - Facilitates compassion, appreciation, and acceptance of challenges others face
- Learn how to talk to parents about a difficult topic



Conversational Tactics for Speaking to Parents about Mental Health Concerns

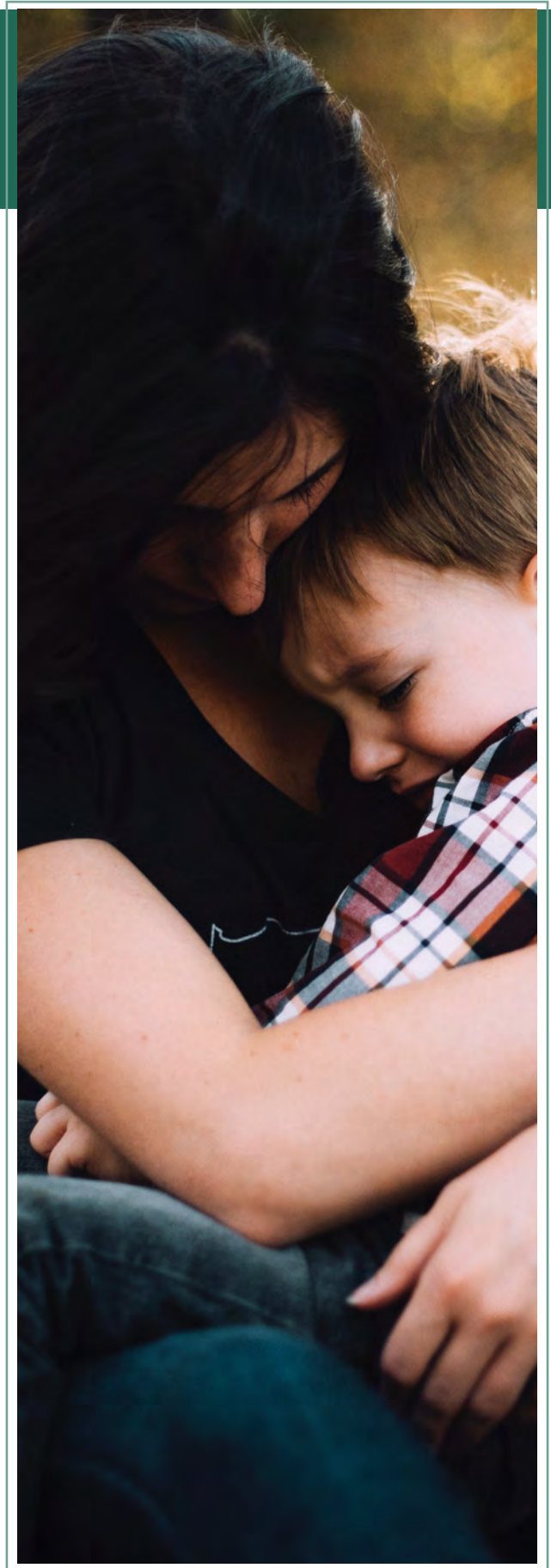
Don't introduce the conversation alone

- If you believe a student may have a mental health issue, speak with the mental health staff at your school (guidance counselor, social worker, or other mental health professionals).

As a team, you can talk about **the best strategy** for sharing concerns with the parents, **identify local resources** (names, locations, and phone numbers), and any next steps

- You may not be the best person to offer additional assistance because you aren't in a clinical context or a mental health practitioner – that is okay! Sharing resources is just as valuable!

- Take location into account
 - Provide a quiet room to discuss sensitive issues
- Use “we” to establish you are working **together as a team**
 - Collaborative relationships are made with trust, clear communication, receptiveness, and acknowledgement of common goals
- Reassure they are doing the right thing by requesting additional support
- Be prepared and aware that some parents **may not believe** in or accept mental illness
- Have an open mind when listening to the parents' perspectives and priorities
- Don't make presumptions about the student's home life





Talking to Students about Mental Health

Be receptive

- Take the lead and **show initiative**
- Sit in a relaxed position – positive body language will encourage both parties to relax
- Mention the behaviors/actions that you've noticed and are causing you to ask about their mental health

- Ask open-ended questions
- Normalize talking about mental health
 - **Destigmatize mental health** by pointing out that it touches all of us
- Model healthy habits
 - Share with your students how you take care of your physical and mental health as well as how you **practice self-care**
- Empathize rather than advise
 - If a student opens up to you about their concerns, validate their experiences rather than try to "fix" their problems and refrain from directly sending them to speak with someone else
- Demonstrate healthy communication skills
 - Self-awareness
 - Emotional self-management
 - Social awareness
 - Positive relationship skills
 - Responsible decision making
- Teach students how to anticipate and recognize their feelings via **Zone Regulation Chart**
- Affirm, support, and compliment students as they make effective changes

Quick Facts

- **20% of students** aged 9 to 17 have a diagnosable mental health disorder that leads to some impairment
- 1 in 10 young people have a mental health challenge that is severe enough to impair how they function at home, school, or in the community
- **70% of children** nationwide receive mental health services at their school
- Over 40% of school-aged children have revealed problems serious enough to warrant intervention, such as a history of trauma, grief, and loss, or family mental health problems
- Suicide is the third contributing cause of death in students aged 10–24, with 90% of those dying by suicide having an underlying mental illness
- Over **50% of students** with emotional and behavioral disabilities ages 14 and older drop out of high school
Early identification and treatment can greatly reduce suffering and improve outcomes
- **Comorbidity** is frequent in children with depression: about 3 in 4 children aged 3-17 years with depression also have anxiety (73.8%) and approximately 1 in 2 have behavioral problems (47.2%)
- The **onset of major mental illness** may occur as early as 7 to 11 years old
- More than **5% of American teenagers** report experiencing a substance use or alcohol problem

