

Planting Seeds to Promote Family-Centered Student Mental Health

Why are Positive Childhood Experiences through the promotion of family-centered mental health in schools important?

Tennessee schools play a significant role in fostering a safe, stable, and nurturing environment by fostering strong relationships that support the overall student through education, prevention, and early intervention supports.

Promoting Family-Centered Mental Health in Schools Can

- Improve physical and mental wellbeing
- Improve economic support for families and lower overall stress
- Promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments
- Reduce stigma and promote help-seeking for mental health issues
- Ensure a strong start for children
 - Self-regulation and relationship skills
 - Civic and community engagement (Sege et al., 2017)

What are Positive Childhood Experiences?

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are experiences during childhood that promote safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments. PCEs can help children develop a sense of belonging, connectedness, and build resilience (CDC, 2022).

These experiences can include close relationships with any parent or safe, stable adult; feeling safe at home, school, and in the community; and having chances to learn and belong in a community.

Below are strategies and best practices to promote family-centered mental health in schools:

Schoolwide Strategies

Promote Strength-Based Nurturing Relationships

Two-Way Communication: Develop and execute a two-way meaningful communication plan with families and school staff focused on student academics and wellbeing.

- Identification of communication preference of every family.
- Actively engages with and solicits feedback.

Examples:

- **First Call Home or Meeting Connection Conversation Starters**
 - What can you tell me about your child that can help me be a great teacher for your child? What should I know?
 - What is the best way to contact you? What is the best time to contact you?
 - Here is the best way to contact me.... and I encourage you to call/email, etc., whenever you have a question.
 - Expect to hear from me throughout the year and know that I want to hear from you.

- **Principal Follow Up of Newly Enrolled Student at End of First Day/Week**
 - How was your child's first week of school? Were there any challenges mentioned by your child?
 - How can we as a school best support you and your child moving forward?
 - I welcome your feedback and encourage you to reach out to me with suggestions or concerns you have at any time. You can reach me via email or by phone.

Build a System of Support: Develop and execute a system of support integrating protective factors that foster awareness and empowerment for students, families, and schools staff.

- Provides professional development opportunities for school staff focused on learning about and supporting their students and families.
- Supports families in understanding and navigating system.
- Encourages family voice and leadership.

Examples:

- **Edutopia: Making Sure Each Child is Known Professional Development Activity**
 - *Poster activity family-centered questions:*
 - *Does someone in the building know the student by their name?*
 - *What do we know about the student personally?*
 - *What do we know about the student academically?*
 - *What is one identified strength of the student?*
 - *What do we know about the child's family?*
 - *Is a member of the family connected with the school?*
 - *What support, if any, does the student/family need?*
- **Check-In**
 - At the beginning of each day/class have the students check in by answering a fun question, giving a rating of 1-5, or thumbs up/side/down. This strategy can also be used at the end of the day/class.
- **Hopes and Dreams Activity**
 - **School Staff:** At the beginning of the school year professional development, school principal asks school staff to identify what their hopes and dreams are for the school year and students. Written statements are displayed in or near the main entrance of school to ensure consistent visibility for students and families.
 - **Families:** During school registration, back to school bash, or family night in the first few weeks of school, ask families to write their hopes and dreams for their child. Once written, letters will be given to teachers to be given to students to serve as a positive reinforcement.
 - For high school: Ask families to write two hopes and dream letters for their child; one to be distributed at the beginning of their freshman year, and the second will be disbursed at the end of the first semester of their senior year.

- **Family Advisory Committee**
 - Promotes family voice through committee that elicits ideas and surface concerns.
 - Encourages the development of family leadership opportunities that link every family with a designated representative.
 - Encourages family leadership that invokes volunteer opportunities as well as interaction among other families to establish a sense of belonging.

Student Leadership and Celebration:

- **Positive Office Referrals**
 - Teachers and staff submit office referrals for student's positive behavior, and principal contacts family to establish relationship through positive communication:
 - We are so proud of your student for exhibiting...traits.
 - How can we as a school best support you and your child moving forward?
 - I welcome your feedback and encourage you to reach out to me with suggestions or concerns you have at any time. You can reach me via email or by phone.
- **Student Advisory Council/ Student Ambassadors**
 - Empowers schools to ignite curiosity, promote agency, and elevate participation to improve educational experiences for the entire student population.
 - Establishes student led opportunities to promote mental wellness, suicide prevention and reduces stigma surrounding mental health.
 - Post-It Note Activity [Heart Wall](#)
 - [Teen Mental Health First Aid](#)
 - Creates and displays 988 posters throughout the building
 - Establishes an afterschool mental wellness club

Family Strategies

Establish a routine that promotes active listening and sense of structure

Examples:

- Establish family routine such as meals together, bedtime stories, chore time, gaming together or family walks.
- Mindfulness Practices- deep breathing, meditation, journaling, exercise or listening to soothing music or sounds.
- Include in your routine opportunities to hear about your child's day to day experiences
 - Example Conversation Starters:
 - What is the most exciting thing that happened at school today?
 - Who did you interact and/or eat lunch with?
 - When was the last time you solved a problem?
 - What is something you are grateful for today?
 - What is a goal that you have for this week? This month? This year?
 - What is your favorite way to learn new things?
- Encourage child's participation in extracurricular activities.
- Focus on your child's strengths before talking about things they can do to improve confidence.

References

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