

Supporting Your Student's Mental Health in the Classroom

Tips for Teachers

Teachers have a profound impact in the classroom, both in how they educate and in how they support their students' growth. When a student is facing a mental health challenge, teachers often walk a fine line of providing support while being cautious to not overstep boundaries. So, what should teachers do if they observe a student struggling with a mental health issue? Below are seven steps to best support the student and their family.

1. Acknowledge your role.

You are in a unique position of observing your students' behaviors in different settings during the day both socially and academically.

2. Get to know your students.

Teachers need to balance supporting the student while getting to know their interests, personality, and behaviors. All students learn better when they know they are cared for and when an adult gets to know them.

3. Build a positive rapport with parents and caregivers.

Make a conscious effort to build positive rapport and trust with parents early. Try making a positive phone call home within the first two weeks at school. Parents will know you have their child's best interest at heart which makes it easier if there is a concern later. Make sure to highlight a strength about their child before speaking on a concern.



4. Build a support network.

Work with your school administrator and social worker to coordinate efforts in reaching out to a student's parent or caregiver. Creating a strong support network can help prepare you with what words and approaches to take with different parents.

5. Approach parents and caregivers kindly.

You have no idea what a parent's mindset or reaction will be. It's key to make sure that parents don't feel attacked for their parenting style, their relationships, or their situation. Parents sometimes need support too. They may see their child's struggle as a reflection on them and their parenting and feel defensive or judged. Along with your support network, be sure to approach the parent with the understanding that they are the experts when it comes to their child.

6. Share an observation.

When you share your concern with the parent, start with an observation about the student. Ask questions instead of using statements that could lead to assumptions. Questions invite further conversation.

Example: John seems to be extra tired and struggling in the morning. What do you think could be causing this?

7. Focus on creating a Trauma-Informed Classroom.

Learn who your students are and strive to have a deeper understanding of them and how they want to be treated. Utilize what you know about their past experiences to learn their triggers so you can better instruct them and provide a safe environment where they can focus on learning.

