Communication 101 for School Mental Health: Engaging Adults on Campus Who Do Not Have a Mental Health Background

Series: Communicating About School Mental Health

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DISCLAIMER

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Southeast (HHS Region 4)

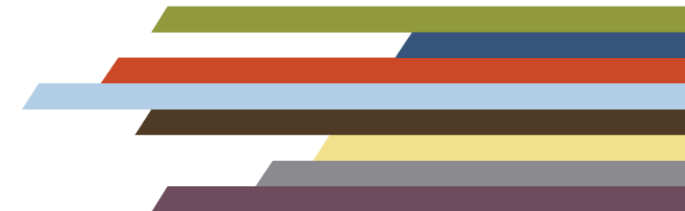**MHTTC** Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The Southeast MHTTC is located at Emory University in the Rollins School of Public Health.

Our Mission: To promote the implementation and sustainability of evidence-based mental health services in the Southeastern United States.

Our Vision: Widespread access to evidence-based mental health services for those in need.

Our Services: We use a public health approach to build leadership capacity and to provide mental health trainings and resources to providers, agencies, and communities across the Southeast.

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

Region IV Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

Please visit our website at www.southeastmhttc.org for upcoming trainings as well as archived recordings of past trainings.

Today's Learning Objectives

- Identify language that is effective and accessible in conveying key concepts about children's mental health.

- Recognize how to navigate around communication pitfalls.

- Use tools and resources to guide communication that increases awareness, builds knowledge, and engages school mental health stakeholders and partners on campus.

Activity

How do you change someone's mind
about something they believe in?

How to Eat an Oreo

Filling first or sandwich style?

Original, Double-stuffed, or flavored?

Best Pizza

New York or Chicago Style?

Is pineapple an acceptable topping?

Filling the Dishwasher

Rinse first or put 'em in dirty?

Utensils facing up or utensils facing down?

Functioning

- Good mental health = ability to function normally

Kids Don't Have it

- No emotional capacity
- No memory

Children are Little Adults

- Same but less complicated
- Need same treatment as adults

What's in the swamp of...

Children's Mental Health

Mental Health is Emotions

- Just be happy
- Need to learn self-control
- Better discipline will help

Environments Matter

- Mostly home and parents
- Society and communities also important

Mental Illness is Chemicals

- Genetic; set in stone
- Nothing we can do
- Drugs are the only treatment

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What is a Communication Bridge?

- Identification of shared values
- Clarify the core issue
- Offer simple concept to make issue concrete
- Provide specific opportunities to address the issue
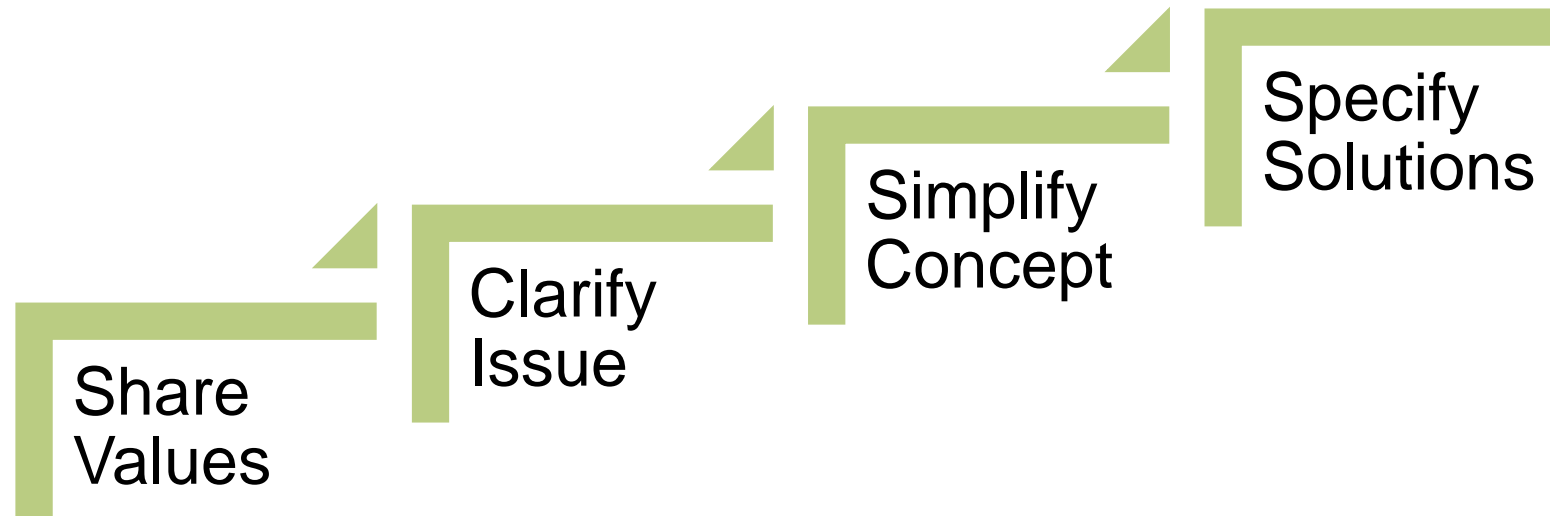
Share Values

Clarify Issue

Simplify Concept

Specify Solutions

A Communication Template for School Mental Health

Level 1
Identify shared values

Level 2
Clarify the issue

Level 3
Simplify the model

Level 4
Specify the solutions

FrameWorks Institute (2010)

How to Build a Communication Bridge

- Core facts
  - Graphics to display information
- Explicit warnings (when referencing myths)
- Alternative explanations

Cook & Lewandowsky (2011)

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Identify shared values

What do we all agree we want for our students?

What do we want for our students?

Shared Values

- What do we all agree we want for our students?

- To do well.
- To be safe and healthy.

Content for Values Bridge

- Explanation connecting children to a shared, positive outcome.
- Assertion that solutions are available, and they need to be implemented.
- Explanation that using resources today can produce long-term improvements in children's outcomes.

Leave out of the values frame
- Focus on disparities or vulnerable children who deserve more.
- "Prevention" or "Crisis"

"The value of prosperity suggests that what is at stake is the nation's future prosperity and well-being, and proved most powerful overall in shifting Americans' support for policies that promote children's mental health."

FrameWorks Institute (2010)

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Clarify the issue

What is mental health when in comes to children?

When it comes to school?

Clarify the issue

Shared Values
- What do we all agree we want for our students?

Clarify Issue
- What is mental health when it comes to students?

- We all have mental health.
- Children in school experience mental health.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AT SCHOOL

1 IN 5 CHILDREN **AGE 13-18** HAVE OR WILL HAVE A MENTAL ILLNESS

THAT MEANS IN A CLASSROOM OF **25 STUDENTS**, 5 WILL EXPERIENCE A MENTAL ILLNESS.

SUICIDE

2ND LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR AGES **10-24**

50% OF STUDENTS AGE 14 AND OLDER WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL.

EVERY DAY IN THE UNITED STATES OVER **5,240 STUDENTS** IN GRADES 7-12 **ATTEMPT SUICIDE**

4 OF 5 HAVE GIVEN **CLEAR WARNING SIGNS**

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID CAN HELP YOU START A CONVERSATION THAT COULD **SAVE A LIFE.**

LEARN MORE AND GET TRAINED AT WWW.MENTALHEALTHFIRSTAID.ORG

BE THE **1** TO MAKE A DIFF3RENCE

Content for Establishing Issue

- "Basic architecture of a human brain is constructed through a process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Like the construction of a home, the building process begins with laying the foundation, framing the rooms and wiring the electrical system, and these processes have to happen in the right order."

- "Early experiences literally shape how the brain gets built. A strong foundation in the very early years increases the probability of positive mental health outcomes. A weak foundation increases the odds of later difficulties."

Cont. Content for Establishing Issue

- "Toxic stress in early childhood is caused by experiences such as extreme poverty, abuse, and chronic or severe maternal depression, all of which can disrupt the developing brain, particularly when children lack supports to protect against these harmful experiences."

- "Just like we need to limit the negative substances in our environments to avoid harm, we need to eliminate the stressors in children's environments to avoid the toxic stress that will affect their mental health."

Simplify the model

Describe school mental health.

Simplify the model

Shared Values
- What do we all agree we want for our students?

Clarify Issue
- What is mental health when it comes to students?

Simplify Concept
- How does school mental health work?

SMH is part of the foundation.

"The levelness of a table is what makes it usable and able to function.

The mental health of a child is what enables them to function and do many things."

Content for Levelness Bridge

- "Some children's brains develop on floors that are level. This is like saying that the children have healthy, supportive relationships, and access to things like good nutrition and health care.

- For other children, their brains develop on more sloped or slanted floors. This means they're exposed to abuse or violence, have unreliable or unsupportive relationships, and don't have access to key programs and resources.

- Remember that tables can't make themselves level — they need attention from experts who understand levelness and stability and who can work on the table, the floor, or even both.

- We know that it's important to work on the floors and the tables early, because little wobbles early on tend to become big wobbles later. So, in general, a child's mental health is like the stability and levelness of a table."

Why focus on student mental health issues?

- They are common and can affect learning.
- Stigma and lack of compassion create barriers to getting help.
- Teachers and school staff can help remove barriers.
- Benefits include:
  - (a) higher academic achievement,
  - (b) lower absenteeism, and
  - (c) fewer behavioral problems. These benefits boost success of schools, teachers, and classrooms.

Specify the solutions

How do we address school mental health?

Specify the solutions

Shared Values
- What do we all agree we want for our students?

Clarify Issue
- What is mental health when it comes to students?

Simplify Concept
- How does school mental health work?

Specify Solutions
- Where do teachers fit in to addressing student wellness?

Teachers and school staff steady the foundation. They level the "table."

WHAT WOULD YOU DO ABOUT…

- A student with asthma?

- A colleague with diabetes?

- A student with food allergies?

- A colleague with depressive disorder?

- A student with severe test anxiety?

A Communication Template for School Mental Health

Level 1
Identify shared values

Level 2
Clarify the issue

Level 3
Simplify the model

Level 4
Specify the solutions

A Communication Template for School Mental Health

Shared Values	• What do we all agree we want for our students?	→	Capable Responsible
Clarify Issue	• What is mental health when it comes to students?	→	All have MH
Simplify Concept	• How does school mental health work?	→	Stable foundation
Specify Solutions	• Where do teachers fit in to addressing student wellness?	→	Steady the foundation

Traps & Backfires

Reinforced Familiarity Backfire

Avoid focus on the myth. Focus on the facts you wish to communicate, not the myth.

Overkill Backfire

A simple myth is more cognitively attractive than an over-complicated correction.

Worldview Backfire

If someone is strongly fixed in their views, encountering counter-arguments can cause them to strengthen their views.

Confirmation Bias Backfire

People seek out information that bolsters their existing view.

Cook, J. & Lewandowsky, S. (2011)

Disconnects

What not to do.

1. "Begin conversation with the terms *mental health* or *mental illness.*

2. Fall into the fatalism trap: For instance, that mental illness is primarily caused by genetics and/or that development is set by age three or four.

3. Fall into the mentalism trap: For instance, that an individual has responsibility and control over their emotional health and well-being.

4. Assume that people can understand why "investment" in early childhood prevention saves money and improves outcomes …without first improving their understanding of the process of child development.

5. Use vivid case studies of individual children or families to highlight policy or program needs. These are commonly told stories in the media that easily trigger notions of fatalism and obscure solutions."

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Activity

Identify a stakeholder you want to build a connection with:

- Superintendent

- Parent

- Teacher

- Principal

- School Board Member

- Custodian

- School Nurse

- Bus Driver

- SRO/Law Enforcement

- Vice/Assistant Principal

- Other...

I discovered...

I re-learned...

I was surprised to learn...

I forgot that...

I noticed that...

I plan to...

I will tell colleagues about...

Resources: Research & Tools

Influencing Opinions

- *DeBunking Handbook*. Cook & Lewandowsky.

Children's' Mental Health

- *The Case for SEL*. CASEL.
- *Talking About Children's Mental Health: A Frameworks Communications Toolkit*. Frameworks Institute.

Thursday August 5
12:00 - 1:30pm ET

Making Sense of School Mental Health: A New Graphic Tool on the Role of Teachers

THANK YOU!

- Our funding comes from SAMHSA, which requires us to evaluate our services. We appreciate your feedback about this event, which will provide information to SAMHSA and assist us in planning future meetings and programs. Your feedback counts!

- Please click on the link to complete the SAMHSA required survey:

  https://ttc-gpra.org/P?s=295516

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