Sources of Support for Students Experiencing Distress

When supporting students experiencing distress, it is helpful to identify various formal and informal supports that can form a support network. It often takes a team to effectively support student wellbeing. Listed below some of the roles that may be available in your school and community to provide support for students experiencing distress.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR

School counselors may support student mental health by providing classroom instruction, individual and group counseling to students, and by collaborating with school staff and families. They work with all students, whether they have a diagnosable mental health problem or not, to support their personal development, academic success, and career trajectory. More information can be found at the American School Counselors Association website: https://www.schoolcounselor.org.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

School psychologists support student mental health and learning concerns by providing psychological assessment, intervention, and prevention services. Additionally, school psychologists consult with school staff, families, and facilitate referrals to services in the community. More information about school psychologists can be found at the National Association of School Psychologists website: https://www.nasponline.org.

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER

School social workers provide a variety of student mental health supports, including group and individual counseling, developing behavior support plans, school-wide prevention initiatives, and crisis intervention. They often act as a link between schools and families, assisting the family in accessing resources, and advocating for the needs of the child and family. School social workers may also provide outreach activities, such as home visits. More information can be found about school social workers at the School Social Work Association of America website: https://www.sswaa.org.

SCHOOL NURSE

School nurses provide general health and wellbeing support for students at school. Students with emerging mental health problems often come into contact with the school nurse, especially if they are expressing physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches, fatigue, or feeling generally unwell. When supporting student mental health, school nurses may be involved in administering student medications at school, and consulting with school and community mental health professionals. You can learn more at the National Association of School Nurses website: https://www.nasn.org/home.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Students may access a range of mental health services in the community, including counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and pediatricians. Community mental health services are offered in primary care, outpatient clinics, hospitals, and by mobile response agencies. Many community mental health providers are located in schools to provide mental health supports and services directly to students in the school building, working close partnership with school staff and families. For more information about community mental health, visit the National Council for Behavioral Health at https://www.thenationalcouncil.org.

INFORMAL SUPPORTS

Natural and informal supports include family members and caregivers and other supportive adults and peers in a student's life, such as mentors, coaches, extended family members. Natural supports play essential roles in supporting student mental health and wellbeing by monitoring a student's mental health, meeting a student's basic needs such as providing transportation and supervision, promoting the development of a student's strengths and interests, and being someone to talk to.

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

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