Effective Classroom Strategies for Children with Mental Health Issues

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Outline

- Definition
- Current Focus of mental health with young children
- Statistics
- Types of common mental health issues in children
- Strategies
- Implications
Defining Mental Health

**Mental health** refers to:
- The capacity to experience and manage emotions
- Form close and secure relationships
- Learn and experience life in a healthy way

**Continuum of mental health:** range of behavior associated with:
- Positive social and emotional development
- Mental health problems
- Mental illness

**Early Intervention is best!**
Between 13-20% of families have a child with a mental health problem within a given year.

Under age 6: 13-20% have emotional, behavioral or other mental health problems.

Common Mental Health Issues in Children:

- ADD/ADHD - 6.8%
- Behavioral/Conduct Disorder - 3.5%
- Anxiety - 3%
  - Generalized anxiety disorder
  - Separation anxiety
  - Obsessive-compulsive disorder
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Depression 2.1%

INCREASING AND MANY UNDIAGNOSED
Understanding prevalence of mental health problems

Recognizing consequences

Problems at home, with peers, in school

Increase issues with substance abuse, criminal behavior, serious risk-taking

Issue with self-esteem, learning and relationships

Understanding Mental Health Issues

Understanding socioeconomic factors

Low SES higher rates of mental health issues (not rates)

Increase ER visits

Poor access to health care/affordable effects treatment/intervention

Hispanics- less reporting of child mental health issues
We need lots of tools/strategies to effectively work with children with mental health issues.

Effective tools empower children/families, creates a partnership.
Strategies to Help
Teacher’s Role

- Demonstrating sensitivity
  - Supportive Communication
  - Flexibility & understanding
  - Teacher as trigger
- BEING A ROLE MODEL
- Understanding successful integration
  - Positive attitude & support
  - Include the child (promote acceptance/tolerance)
  - Self-fulfilling prophecy
Creating Supportive Environments

- Welcoming setting, attuned to children’s development
- Low teacher-child ratios
- Quality relationship with teacher & family
- Respect ethnic, cultural and racial aspects of family’s views
- Mental health stigma
Build Cooperation and Harmony in the classroom

- Provide more small group activities
  - Cooperation, not competition
  - Partnering children
- Provide interesting challenges, encourage children’s natural interests
- Recognize children’s strengths & needs to plan activities
  - Ask the child to be a helper
- Communicate appropriate limits & guide to positive interactions
- Support & care for children through challenging circumstances
Class Meeting Strategy

- Circle Time/Calendar Time
  - Length Issues
- Do NOT violate HIPPA Act
- Rules for class meetings
  - Everyone has a chance to speak
  - We listen to each other
  - We treat all with respect
- Stating the purpose of class discussions
  - Bullying, Aggressive Behavior, Worries, Events
- Helping children remember to "speak up," take turns, stay on topic, and listen to others
- Encouraging children to give each other suggestions.
- Keeping track of children's ideas or questions on an easel or whiteboard
- Little Tykes Home Daycare and Preschool class meeting VIDEO
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Spd8F5mD8C8A
  - https://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200611/BTJG
guidance.pdf (resource)
Persona Doll Strategy

- When we cannot find age appropriate books
- Persona dolls with stories should
  - Represent children’s identity, interactions, emotions, and family life - Mental Health
  - Include common experience
  - Include issues needing exploration
    - anxiety, aggression, fidgeting
  - Address current events
  - Tackle stories from social justice history
- These dolls are not included with the everyday doll options in dramatic play
- DO NOT VIOLATE HIPPA ACT
Addressing Feelings and Emotions

ACTIVITY
Emotional Literacy

“Identifying feelings”
- Young children tend to react unconsciously
  - May not realize if they feel hunger, fatigue, or frustrated
  - Ex- infant crying
  - REWARD PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS AND SELF-IDENTIFYING FEELINGS!!!

- Emotional Literacy Stages
  - Apply verbal labels to emotions for children
  - Children’s ability to identify and express their own feelings
  - Adults’ active/reflective listening of children’s feelings
  - Adult’s talking about their own feelings with children

Picture: Feelings chart
Routines

- Strong Daily Routines
- Completion of work with flexibility
- Clear expectations
- PECS
Cozy Area

- Social and quiet areas to allow children to select setting that meets their needs
- NOT A TIME OUT!
- Child learns to identify when they feel overwhelmed
- Helps Anxiety, ADHD,
Managing Stress

- Sleep
- Healthy Diet
- Exercise
- Relaxation
- Age appropriate activities
Appropriate choices to manage extreme behaviors

#1 - HELP THE CHILD CALM DOWN IF POSSIBLE
   - ‘TIME-IN’
   - Re-regulate nervous system
Verbal Communication is Important

“I Messages” -

- Helps with setting limits
- Says how their behavior affects you/others

**Step 1:** Say what the child’s unacceptable behavior is
- “When you throw the toy....”

**Step 2:** Say your feelings about it
- “…I am afraid…”

**Step 3:** Say the effect this behavior has on you:
- “…that you may hurt our friends.”

**Step 4:** Move on to “Problem Solving”
- What else can we do?
- Choose a solution
- Try it out
Three-Step Limit-Setting

- **Step 1: Explain Rule**
  - “Johnny, blocks are not for throwing— you could hurt someone. You CAN play with them on the floor”

- **Step 2: State Consequence**
  - “Blocks are not for throwing. If you throw them again, you will need to find something else to do”

- **Step 3: Follow Through**
  - Discuss why it is not okay to throw blocks
  - Redirect child to another activity (stay with the child)
Observe the Behavior

- Collect information to determine cause of behavior/Documentation
- ABC Sampling/Functional Assessment
- Answering the 5 “W” Questions about Behavior
  - Who was involved in the behavior?
  - What happened?
  - When did the behavior occur?
  - Where does the behavior typically take place?
  - Why does the child behave this way?
Explore Alternatives

- What indirect strategies can be used to change the child’s behavior?
- Classroom materials (scarcity, age appropriateness) and furnishings
- Grouping patterns & group size
- Classroom schedule
- Access to adults
Consider the Implications

- Consider the consequences if the behavior is not addressed
  - Classroom tone
    - Creating Negative Environment if we do not address
  - Unaddressed behaviors may continue or become exacerbated
  - Children may suffer a loss of social acceptability or self-esteem
  - Other children may be victimized or isolated
  - Learning opportunities may be lost
  - Self-fulfilling prophecy
  - Long-term/serious issues
    - Suicide, substance abuse, criminal behavior, not able to function in society

"Well, I hope you’re satisfied — The school nurse says I’m nearsighted from sitting in the corner all the time!"
Additional Help!

- Seek support from local services
- Requesting support from families
  - Discuss the strengths and challenges with parent
    - Parents worry child is too challenging or not accepted by other children
  - Inclusion (everyone is welcomed)
Questions
References