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Founder and President,
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STUDY OVERVIEW AND UPDATES



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Adolescent mental health needs that are not appropriately addressed can negatively affect many aspects of life. Despite primary care doctors conducting mental health screening with their patients, **less than 40%** of adolescents are seen on a regular basis. Project SHIELD has partnered with 14 high schools throughout Pennsylvania to explore whether the school setting would be an ideal location for mental health screenings to identify students in need. This study has three phases which include:

- 1) Gathering stories and feedback from school staff, parents and students to ensure it is most appropriate and applicable for those audiences;
- 2) Conducting mood screeners with participating high schools; and
- 3) Engaging communities from participating schools to help advance mental health awareness and reduce stigma.



PennState
PRO Wellness

The SHIELD team completed mood screenings in spring 2020, slightly earlier than intended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, the SHIELD team and school stakeholders are working collaboratively to compile final study data and develop and implement each school's community engagement action plan. This edition features stories and resources that may help any reader identify ways to break the silence, use your voice, and start conversations about mental health in your home, office, or school setting. Please share these resources with friends and colleagues.

MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH FINDINGS

Coping With Stress Through Texting: An Experimental Study

By Joanna Yau, PhD, Stephanie Reich, PhD, and Tao-Yi lee, MS / August 12, 2020

Researchers at the University of California conducted an experimental research study with teenagers to examine the psychological impacts of texting after a stressful event. Paired adolescent friend dyads were assigned to one of three arms after the stressful event:



Smartphone use and allowed to text a friend



Smartphone use but not allowed to text a friend



Zero smartphone use

The researchers found that both males and females who texted a friend after the stressful event reported decreased stress levels and better moods. Though texting as a form of communication has its limitations, it can facilitate conversations from afar, which is beneficial for adolescents to quickly connect with their peers, especially in times of need.



LINK TO FULL STORY:
<http://bit.ly/StressTexting>



SUCCESS STORY

Pivoting in the Middle of a Pandemic

In March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pennsylvania school buildings closed and moved to remote instruction. This required fast thinking and a total reorganization of the K-12 educational model. Despite the less than ideal circumstances, our SHIELD partnership gave us a unique window into how school communities adapted to overcome barriers.

To better understand the perspectives of students living through disruptions to their social connections, the shield team conducted six virtual focus groups with 39 teens during June 2020. Students shared their feelings of **frustration and confusion**, but also stories of **resilience** and the importance of **staying connected with peers**. Students reported spending extra time with parents and siblings, and on personal hobbies, such as painting, writing, and exercising.

SHIELD school staff shared their efforts to continue to connect with students remotely. Counselors used platforms such as ZOOM and Google Meet, and made themselves available during virtual open office hours. Student Assistance Program (SAP) teams transitioned to online meeting platforms, allowing them to continue to meet and complete the referral pathway for students in need. In addition, some schools used this time to restructure their workflow to better support their student body.

“...it was really hard for me to have the incentive to actually synthesize what I was learning. I would go to a lesson, listen to the teacher, do the assignment and just forget what I learned completely.”

“I think I'm definitely closer to my family now. During school, to be honest, I never really talked to them because I'd go to school all day, then I had practice and I would just come home and be so tired. I'd just be in my room either doing homework or just getting ready for bed. I definitely talk to them a lot more now, so I feel a lot closer to them.”

“We've been texting a lot and then face timing. So, when we do go back to school, it's not like we're complete strangers.”

“I'm writing comedy sketches. In school, I always liked incorporating jokes into assignments. Obviously now, I don't have any assignments and any school work. So, I tried to find a different creative outlet, so I've just been writing comedy sketches with terrible jokes.”

SUCCESS

Breaking the Silence

There has been much speculation about the long-term impact of the pandemic on adolescent mental health. Despite changes in routines and schedules that may have increased opportunities to spend time together, it does not always mean we are talking more, or that we are talking about the things that matter. Are you concerned about the mental health of a young person and not sure what to say? Do you worry that you might make things worse?

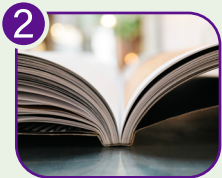
It all starts with a conversation.

Developing open communication between adults and youth is vital to helping our young people make healthy choices. Even if you aren't sure what to say, the important thing is you make a genuine effort to reach out.

These tips can help you start a courageous conversation:



1 Talk early and often. Consistent conversations are a great way to strengthen relationships and let youth know you care.



2 Use books, television shows, or movies to initiate conversations. Using everyday experiences can be a natural way to engage in meaningful conversation.



3 Allow silence. Sometimes pauses are needed to provide the space for a young person to figure out their thoughts.



4 Be persistent. Try not to take it personally if a young person doesn't want to talk about what's going on at first. Your interest shows them that you are willing to talk about their mental health, or any difficulties they're experiencing, whenever they're ready.



5 Practice respect. Young people may have different feelings, values and experiences from yours. Try to show respect for their viewpoints and they will be more likely to listen and respect yours.

If you feel stuck, overwhelmed, or unsure, don't hesitate to reach out to a professional. Your willingness to get involved can make all the difference in the life of a young person.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATION

Marisa Vicere
Founder and President,
Jana Marie Foundation



The Jana Marie Foundation offers a variety of unique programs geared towards decreasing mental health stigma and promoting acceptance and resiliency. Programs such as **CONNECT** (improves parent and teen communication) and **RISE** (interactive club for high schoolers) are two of their numerous initiatives.



Get involved:
http://bit.ly/JM_Engage



EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES



Mental Health Resources

Resource 1: Inspirational Video

Don't Suffer from your Depression in Silence

Nikki Webber Allen shares her story with depression. After suffering silently for years, the surprising loss of her nephew to depression and anxiety motivated her to learn more. Nikki came to the conclusion that mental health struggles can't just be "shaken off." Don't let the stigma and shame keep you silent.



Watch more about her story:
<http://bit.ly/BreakingDepression>

TED Ideas worth
spreading



NATIONAL
**SUICIDE
PREVENTION**

LIFELINE™
I-800-273-TALK
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Resource 2: Call 9-8-8

During 2022, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number will transition from 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) to **988**.

This new change will require all phone service providers to connect 988 calls to 1-800-273-TALK. Similar to 911, a three digit telephone number is simpler to remember and dial than an eleven digit number. The change is intended to make it easier for those in crisis to call and connect with a counselor, especially during these challenging times.

