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The Effectiveness of Therapy in the Public School System

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to create options, for public schools, to educate their student about mental health. Currently 4% of preschoolers are being diagnosed with depression. (Statistic Brain, 2015) Schools need to do something to stop this epidemic. One person dies every two hours due to suicide, (AFSP, 2015) which can be prevented so easily if students received help from an early age. The options provided are having prevention programs readily available for students, integrated projects set into the curriculum, and mandatory psych evaluations for students. To analyze these options the criteria used is how much access the students would have to these options, the amount of time it would take to complete each option, and the overall impact that the options would create in the students' life.

Keywords: Therapy, Suicide, Depression

The Effectiveness of Therapy in the Public School System

Students are supposed to be able to feel safe in school, and have adults that understand their needs and worries surrounding them. Schools do not have every need of the students in mind, which is understandable because there are so many aspects to their education that are already being taken care of. Every year more and more young adults suffer from mental illnesses without anyone to help them or to understand them. Without any information on how to heal, students will falter in school and in life. Only half of U.S schools are mandated to have school counseling. (American School Counselor Association (ASCA), 2014) Every student has gone through some sort of hardship at one point or another in their lives. Teachers and administrative staff are not trained to counsel students with trauma or mental illnesses. Students need trained facilitated help when it comes to sensitive issues. When students are not completely focused on school, they fall through the cracks without anyone noticing. Schools tend to focus on test scores, especially low ones, and bringing them up, but never look at the actual problem. Having a trained therapist on staff at every school will help students have a long successful academic career. Because there is an average of 16% of high schoolers nationwide that have reported to have considered suicide and 13% of those who have created a plan while about 8% actually followed through, schools need to make a stand on mental illnesses. (Statistic Brain, 2015) Schools not only need to create awareness and destroy the stigma of mental illnesses, but have someone on-site to help students that have clear signs of mental illnesses.

At the age of fifteen, my mother was deported and I was left alone. Technically speaking, I did not have a legal guardian, but was left in the care of my older sister. I felt lost and alone for a very long time. I self-harmed, and have attempted suicide on three separate occasions. I had no idea what was wrong with me, or what to do to control it. I was never taught about mental

illnesses, or how to treat them. It took a very long time just to put a name on the infliction I had. I had depression, and after I had a name for what I had I still had no clue what to do about it. As children we are taught that if we scrape a knee we go to the nurse, if we have a cold we stay home from school, but we are never taught what to do when our brain is not letting us be our normal selves.

Currently almost every young adult has the world in the palm of their hands. They can speak to people from around the world with the press of a button. Technology has brought so many new advances to life, but also some harsh realities. Bullying has evolved from physical acts of pain to emotional. Young boys and girls have bodies that they are ashamed of because they can't look like the people on the internet. Children, students, put themselves out there for the whole world to see, and there are people who lash out and hurt them. Since the year 2000 there has been a "23% increase among children," with depression. (Statistic Brain, 2015) According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 10-24. (American SPCC, 2014) There is so much death in the world that is harder to control than suicide, such as famine, diseases and infections that aren't or can't be treated, but suicide and mental illnesses can be 100% prevented. "More teenagers die from suicide than from cancer, and AIDS combined." (American SPCC, 2014)

Depression, which most commonly leads to suicide, is a complex diagnosis which can develop differently in everyone. Statistically speaking, 15% of depressed people commit suicide. (Statistic Brain, 2015) Generally speaking, depression can be caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. (Harvard Health Publications, 2009) There are also other many factors that can lead to depression, such as stated before a chemical imbalance in the brain, but also family genetics. In many cases it is common to find a family gene passed down to children that "carry the faltering

neurotransmitters” which can lead to chemical imbalances in the brain. (Harvard Health Publications, 2009) To help those who suffer from depression, they can seek medical attention or psychiatric help. How they decided to conquer the mental illness depends on the person’s values and morals. In a world where “18.8 million people are affected by depressive disorders,” “4.3% of students between the ages 12-18 suffer from depression,” and that number is rising every year. (Statistic Brain, 2015)

Parents typically want what is in their child’s best interest, but the decision can also be affected by the morals and values they themselves were raised with and want to implicate on their children. Their child’s education should be the number one priority in any situation, but mental illnesses can take away from doing the simplest of tasks such as getting out of bed, or eating. Some adults do not believe in mental illnesses being actual diseases but consider them to be a reason to justify laziness, or carelessness. The stigma of mental illnesses has been around for centuries dating back to “civilization itself,” and can be found referenced to in “almost all the ancient books of law.” (Wig, 1997) Whether or not the parent believes in the actuality of depression, the students shouldn’t suffer and have a choice and options to get better. Simply speaking out can do so much help which could be done if there is an on-site therapist in whom they can choose to seek help with or without the approval of the parents.

The real cost of not having a school therapist is mental illnesses and even worse, teen suicide. Schools having different options of prevention can help students, who may not feel comfortable seeing a therapist, seek the help they need. Prevention Programs are designed to help those who seek the program. Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (S.A.V.E) and The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) are two of many prevention programs readily available to help students with depression. Schools can access many different programs through

the internet; most programs can be found to be free and are nonprofit. Volunteers will come to the school to present the information for free. Most volunteers have their own story to tell, and that can impact students in a big way. Seeing that these volunteers are just regular people can make them relate on so many levels.

It may be a dark topic but since it is the number three killer of young adults, students should be exposed to as much information as they can. Having a themed integrated project between English and History, or maybe English and Art can be really be helpful for students not to only learn about the topic but apply it to real life situations. Teachers can gain access to the information for projects very easily. All prevention programs include a lot of information on their home website. Teachers and students can gather this information for free and quite easily. Having a unit on this topic would take some time away and most likely replace another topic. Teachers could use this topic in so many ways. History can use it in their modern era section. English can use literature that pertains to the topic. Art can use Picasso's Blue Period and even more modern works. This topic isn't as lively but just as important. Having students think of this topic from different perspectives and subjects can help them truly grasp the integrity of the topic and just how important it is.

There are so many warning signs for mental illnesses. If teachers and school themselves were allowed to send students for psych evaluations there can be an early diagnoses, and help for the students before the inevitable. Psych evaluations are not expensive and can help prevent teen suicide. Psych evaluations can be made by a professional and some can be found online, but are not as reliable as seeing a professional. There are thousands of facilities that have free professionals that include psych evaluations for students without the means to pay for expensive therapists. Psych evaluations do take quite a bit of time, with a professional it may take more

than one session to diagnose a patient. An early diagnosis is crucial to helping someone in need of medical attention.

After the extensive research collected, the best option to solve the problem is to have prevention programs readily available for students at every school. Students need some sort of outlet to release all their negative feelings. The volunteers that present the information and help with the programs have invested their time, because they themselves have been through similar instances as these students. Being surrounded by peers that can relate to them can help young adults realize that there is a life without depression, and they are not alone in this fight. After all the information presented, it has been said that students need an on-site therapist to help cope with their problems. Students with mental illnesses have been neglected and overlooked. They need trained professionals to help them grow and move past this part of their lives. Students should be living a carefree life and focusing on school and not their mental illnesses. Since suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among the ages 10-24 (American SPCC) it's crucial that schools take a stand and create awareness.

Mood Tracker

This worksheet can be adjusted for students with a mental illness or without. This worksheet will allow students to track what they feel on a day to day basis. Teaching students to be aware of their emotions and how they fluctuate is important for them to understand their own bodies.

(Canadian Mental Health Association, 2010)

Mind Tracker

Throughout the day, use the symbols to track how you are feeling, what you are doing and anything else that you are concerned about. If your moods, thoughts or behaviours are getting in the way of everyday life, take this tracker to an adult. If you reach out, things CAN change and you CAN feel better.

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
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| I felt... | | How much (many) _____ did I... | | | | Other | |
|-----------|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--|--|-------|--|
| 😊 Happy | 😬 Hyper | zzz Sleep | D Drugs | | | | |
| 😞 Sad | 😰 Anxious | F Food | AJ Alcohol | | | | |
| 😫 Tired | 😡 Irritable | E Exercise | SH Self Harm | | | | |
| 😡 Angry | 😊 Calm | C Cigarettes | S Thoughts of suicide | | | | |

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