

Mental health 101

Schools increase mental health acknowledgments

Lauren Schwarz, Samantha Erwin
Co-Editor-in-Chief, Staff Writer

Mental health has been ignored for many years, but times have changed and the way it's being addressed in schools is, too.

Until more recently, talks and recognition of mental health were non-existent. Resources were not readily available at a student's disposal and the entire concept of mental health was foreign. Educators and those in administration weren't trained and equipped to understand the importance of positive mental health.

"Back then, society had promoted that mental health issues meant that there was something 'wrong' with you and that something had to be fixed. That was the old way of thinking. In my profession, and since the mid to late 1990s, we changed the perspective; instead of immediately asking 'what's wrong with you?'"

Limited licensed psychologist/licensed professional counselor psychologist Malissa Wood said.

For years, teens struggled with obtaining a balance of physical, mental and emotional well-being. Even before COVID-19, teens struggled with their mental health. However, it's time for schools and society to recognize how difficult it can be for teenagers in this day and age to maintain a positive outlook on life and provide necessary support.

"Many teens are walking through life with problems they feel they can't talk to anybody about," UCS social worker Yvette Jones said.

To help, schools and districts are normalizing the subject of mental health and taking action, such as educating teachers on the importance of mental health, holding informative assemblies and working with students to see what is in their best interest.

"I think of it as this: for students and themselves, wellness as a whole includes our physical health, as well as our mental health in our brain, where our emotions and our thoughts and our behaviors stem from it; is part of our body and our brain is an organ. I believe it should be regarded, nurtured and taken care of the same way that we would take care of an ailment in our physical

body," Wood said.

Students and school staff are also people. "There's always room for improvement and even when we think we have it all right, there's still more innovative ways to battle life's issues and problems. There's always growth to be had," Assistant Principal Kate Walker said.

For example, student council planned, organized and hosted a mental health awareness week at the end of January. Each day of the, students and staff wore different colors to represent different aspects of mental health to help spread awareness. A school wide destress day provided students the opportunity to engage in activities, such as yoga to coloring.

"It's important for students to be given the opportunity to unwind during school because being able to unwind allows for their mind to be relaxed and stress to be put aside," said Vito Pellecchia, senior student council mental health and week leader. "Our minds are always working and we are told and given countless tasks in and out of school, so it's important to have a break from it all."

Stress-free activities positively reinforced the message that it's healthy to sit back for a moment and take a breather.

"The purpose behind mental health week was to show students that it's common and okay to be dealing with outside factors, but it's not okay to not know how to deal with them."

Pellecchia said. "Mental health week combines numerous activities that cater towards a wide variety of students in hopes of influencing each one."

Teaching high school students about mental health improves their attitudes toward treatment, increases willingness to seek help from a counselor and boosts their overall mental health literacy, according to health.usnews.com.

"Mental health isn't always something that you can see, so talking about it probably helps so many people," Jones said. "I think it's very important to spread awareness."

Alongside events like these, IKE also offers mental health awareness through one of its clubs, S.O.A.R (Supporting others, arise radiantly). The club centers around supporting mental health and destigmatizing the negative conversations around it. This student-led club: is open to everyone and has monthly meets for those



interested in attending.

"S.O.A.R is such a positive experience to be a part of. The things we talk about are just things that carry through life and not just school and learning about mental health hosts so many benefits; not only for yourself but for those around you as well," senior co-president Abigail Rauchfleish said.

In addition to club involvement, there are a variety of opportunities for students provided by the district for those struggling. The counseling office is open during school hours and equipped with trained counselors. Additionally, the district offers up to 10 free, confidential counseling sessions with a licensed school psychiatrist.

"There has to be a lot of resources available because we don't know what works best for each individual until they try it and feel successful with that method," Walker said. "Then, they know that that's a tool for their toolbox

for the future. So by providing a lot of different resources, people can feel or decide what works best for them and their mental health."

The provided help from the schools is there to be utilized by the student body and is more accessible than in the past.

"We are trying to give kids resources to help them through difficult parts in their life and we want them to realize that sometimes it's okay to not be okay," Walker said. "We need to provide many different types of resources because not everybody works through problems the same way. Some students need music and some students need quiet time; some students need yoga exercise; some students might need a resource to talk to some people or heal by writing."

Students can take initiative to make the school a welcoming and safe community by regularly checking

up on their friends and peers. Asking a simple "Are you alright?" might mean more to someone struggling than they might let on. However, if the situation is life-threatening or concerning, it's important to reach out to a mental health professional.

"What happens with that is then our negative emotions get stored inside of our body, they either start to hurt us physically, or they start to hurt us mentally. Our thoughts might be altered or our behaviors might be altered because we're holding in these feelings," Wood said. "Because of that, people get relief when they start to talk about the hard stuff and talk about their emotions."

Illustration: Isabella Bidler

Editor's note: If you or anyone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 and reach out to a trusted adult.

"The act of talking about mental health helps us process our emotions and helps us learn about ourselves and make connections with others."
Kate Walker, Assistant Principal

Q&A
What is a mental challenge you overcame?
Marsida Cukaj
Staff Writer



"During COVID-19, I got very unmotivated because of virtual learning and I became very depressed and had anxiety. But just going to therapy, exercising, having support from family and friends just really make a big difference and I've overcome that and I'm having a great school year." Lainie Sloan '23



"Stress is a challenge I overcame. I just kind of like made a plan and organized a bunch of different things. I set a bunch of calendar dates and organized everything in my life" Ashlyn Guigar '24



"A challenge was grades. I was basically failing when it came to COVID-19 because I just couldn't do it online. I think I just put more time aside and put away the PC. Coming to school and facing the teacher helps me to focus and think about it [school]." Joshua Urbano '25



"Since I dance, there's all this hard stuff that we do and I normally have mental blocks. But what I do is take a deep breath and just keep trying until I get it." Alexandria Wood '25



"In 10th grade, I wasn't focused on doing anything remotely. In 11th grade, I locked in. I started paying attention to my grades and homework, put less emphasis on trying to make more friends and tried to do something for myself instead of worrying about what others think." Antonio Ventimiglia '23



"A mental health challenge I overcame is procrastinating stuff. I just forced myself to overcome it. Like with homework or something, I'll have an assignment and I just won't do it. Then, at the last second, I know I have to do it so I'll just do it then." Benjamin Dean '24

Healthy help tools

When the going gets tough try some these tips

Lauren Schwarz, Samantha Erwin
Editor-in-Chief, Staff Writer



Knowing when to take breaks
You are the only one who has to spend every moment with yourself. Take time to be with your own presence—it can be a learning experience.

Look good, feel good
Putting effort into your appearance can make a person feel more confident, improving your look isn't easy work, but the outcome can change how you view yourself.



Delegate your time
Prioritize time and create an organized schedule to make life a little less stressful. Schedules remind people of upcoming plans and help reduce anxiousness

Take it one at a time
Take life and daily events step-by-step to promote a less stress-filled day. Less work means a decrease in breakdowns and an increase in improved moods.



Stay organized
Staying organized creates a stronger mindset. Keeping everything in line can de-stress not only a person, but the environment as well. Organization leads to a more healthy and atmosphere.

Infographic credit: Canva