



RESPONDING TO STUDENT DISCLOSURE OF EMOTIONAL PAIN, TRAUMA OR MENTAL ILLNESS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Prior to distribution of this resource, we recommend that you have the following conversation with support staff to evaluate the effectiveness of your school's referral pathways.....

1. What are the referral pathways at this school? Where are they displayed? How are staff (administration, teachers and all other staff) educated about what to do?
2. What are the strengths and challenges of this process and how could it be improved (i.e. what needs to be kept, adjusted or let go)? How are all staff encouraged to provide feedback about its effectiveness?
3. How consistently is the process implemented across the school? How do you know?
4. How are families and students made aware of this process? How are they encouraged to provide feedback?
5. Do the referral pathways work in the best interests of students? How do you know?

To Distribute: Copy back to back, matching the elementary "Responding" page to the elementary "whole class strategies" page. Do the same for the Middle/High School "Responding" and "Whole Class" pages.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Disclosure happens in a context of relationships of trust. In a recent study entitled, '*Should youth disclose their mental illness?*'¹, middle and high school-aged youth in Wisconsin were asked how they determine if a teacher is accessible and someone with whom they can safely talk. Responses highlighted the importance of someone who is ***trustworthy, welcoming and supportive and teachers who know their students***. Other enablers to youth disclosure included a ***teacher who would keep the information private, someone connected to their family and who had strong student bonds***.

Teachers who disclose their own experiences were also seen as more genuine to students as this suggested that teachers were once young with similar problems. Teachers' modelling of vulnerability was also connected to the broader message that ***sharing was okay and students were not alone***. However, some cautions about teacher disclosure included not trying to become peers to students, not explicitly detailing their own problems and not diverting attention away from the student.

¹ Buchholz, B., Aylward, S., McKenzie, S., & Corrigan, P. (2014). Should youth disclose their mental illness? Perspectives from students, parents and teachers: Manuscript submitted to the *Community Mental Health Journal*.

RESPONDING WHEN STUDENTS DISCLOSE EMOTIONAL PAIN, TRAUMA OR MENTAL ILLNESS: MIDDLE AND HIGH-SCHOOL

Self-Care disclaimer for staff: It is important that staff have sufficient self-awareness, prior to and during disclosures, to discern their own capacity for such conversations.

YOUR GOALS ARE TO:	30 second response	3 minute response	10 minute response
<p>Acknowledge feelings and help-seeking</p>	<p><i>“Looks like you’re having a rough day. What can I do right now to help you?”</i></p>	<p><i>““I really appreciate that you have chosen to speak with me today – thank you. I get a sense that life is pretty tough for you at the moment.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I really appreciate that you have chosen to speak with me today – thank you. That shows incredible courage and strength. I want to be honest with you about what happens with the information that you share with me. I want to honour the faith you have placed in me and for you to have trust and safety in the help-seeking process at this school. So, I need you to know what choices we do and don’t have about what you share.”</i> Explain reporting process...</p>
<p>Point to Internal Strengths & External Resources</p>	<p><i>“It can be really tough trying to handle everything on your own. If you ever want to talk about it, please know that I’m here to help or just listen. You can usually find me in room... during....(insert location and available times). Let me know...”</i></p>	<p><i>“How is this making school life difficult for you right now? How would you like me to help?”</i></p>	<p><i>“You are the only person who truly gets just how much this is affecting you right now. Tell me about that so we can use your wisdom to guide us about what we might do/next....”</i></p>
<p>Commit to next steps</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>If you sense urgency....</u></p> <p><i>“On a scale of 1-10, how bad is it?”</i></p> <p><i>“For how long have you been feeling like this?”</i></p>	<p><i>“You know, still being here and coming to school shows just how strong and resilient you are. What are some of your other strengths that you have used to get you this far?”</i></p>	<p><i>“How have you coped with these sorts of feelings before? How were those strategies helpful or unhelpful for you? How would you prefer to handle these feelings right now?”</i></p> <p><i>“Have you ever told anyone else about these feelings or asked for their help? What was that (experience) like for you? Did it help you or the situation?”</i></p> <p><i>“How would you like me to help right now?”</i></p>
<p>Consider referral to Pupil Service Staff</p>	<p><i>“What can we do to bring that number down right now? What do you need?”</i></p>	<p><i>“Despite what’s happening, you have shown incredible determination and persistence and sought help. That is a really big deal. Thank you so much for that and I really hope we have another opportunity to work on this together.”</i></p>	<p><i>“If we need to share this information with someone else, what would you want to say/be said to them? How would you feel about having that conversation? Would it be helpful for us to discuss what that conversation might be like?”</i></p> <p><i>“Together, let’s decide what to do next...”</i> Student shares their thoughts about next steps before sharing your own, combine suggestions and plan next steps/timeframes etc.</p> <p><i>“Thank you for sharing your courage and putting your trust in me. I really appreciate, and will honour, that. I need you to know that I’m confident that we can work this out together. Let’s check-in next on...Is that okay with you?”</i></p>

- Try to use “we” and “us” language as much as possible to minimize the student’s feelings of isolation and alienation and maximize feelings of hope based on a team approach.
- Think about where might be the best place/s in the school for follow up discussions to occur. Ideally, the student would nominate their preference i.e. a space that would minimize visibility in front of peers or would they prefer a playground conversation under the guise of something ‘lighter’/less stigmatizing i.e. homework follow-up?
- Work to preserve the trust, safety and faith they have placed in you and the help-seeking process at your school while at the same time looking for appropriate ways to connect with the parents/family.

FOLLOW CONNECTION PATHWAYS TO YOUR SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF then → ADMINISTRATOR

WHOLE CLASS STRATEGIES (Middle or High School)

Encourage mental health promotion and peer support through social and emotional learning skills:

- teach social and emotional skills that help, encourage and affirm proactive relationship building and help-seeking (see CASEL's 5 core competences: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making).
- provide multiple opportunities for students to express these across different contexts and in different ways i.e. through the arts, in non-verbal and culturally diverse ways.
- normalize and encourage help-seeking for every student by asking them to nominate internal and external resources that might assist them in times of difficulty or challenge (see below).
- promote help-seeking amongst staff by displaying Employee Assistance Program details in staff/common room.



Example: Seeking help is cool at Menomonee Falls School (using school colors)
Children write their preferred external resources/sources of support inside the green bubble and their internal resources/strengths on each finger.

COLLABORATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (CASEL)'S Core Competencies <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies>

SEL Videos - <http://www.casel.org/videos/>

- 1) From Edutopia: Five Keys to Social and Emotional Learning
- 2) Recent Research on the Science Behind Social-Emotional Learning
- 3) In Chicago: A Student and Educators Talk About the Importance and Impact of SEL

KIDSMATTER PRIMARY AUSTRALIA: Free mental health information sheets for staff, parents and carers that focus on:

- **A positive school community** - https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/C1%20MH%20Information%20Sheets_Collated.pdf
- **Social and emotional learning** - https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/C2%20MH%20Information%20Sheets%20_Collated.pdf
- **Working with parents and carers** - https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/C3%20MH%20Information%20Sheets_Collated.pdf
- **Mental health difficulties for children** - https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/C4%20MH%20Information%20Sheets_Collated.pdf

RESPONDING WHEN STUDENTS DISCLOSE EMOTIONAL PAIN, TRAUMA OR MENTAL ILLNESS: ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Self-Care disclaimer for staff: It is important that staff have sufficient self-awareness, prior to and during disclosures, to discern their own capacity for such conversations.

	30 second response	3 minute response	10 minute response
YOUR GOALS ARE TO:			
Acknowledge feelings and help-seeking	<i>"How are you doing? It looks like you might be frustrated...?"</i>	<i>"Thank you for seeking me out today. You are really strong to ask for help. Let's see if we can start to work this out together so you don't feel like you have to deal with this on your own. Is that okay with you?"</i>	<i>"Sharing your feelings can be a really brave thing to do. Thank you so much for sharing them with me. You are not alone...I'm here to help and there are other people at school who can help us out too. We can work together so you can keep feeling safe to share and we can all help you take care of your feelings at school okay?"</i>
Point to Internal Strengths & External Resources	<i>"How long have you been feeling like that?"</i> <i>"What could we both do right now that would help?"</i>	<i>"What can I and your other teacher/s do to help you when you are feeling this way in class.... and at play times? How could you ask us to help?"</i>	<i>"First, I wondered if you have told anyone else about these feelings before? What did they do? Did that help you...how?"</i>
Commit to next steps	<i>"Do you want to talk about it some more?"</i> <i>"If you ever want to talk to me about how you are feeling, you can find me in room.....during.....(insert location and available times). I'm here to help."</i>	<i>"What could the kids in your class do to help you when you are feeling this way in class ...and at play times? How could you ask them to help?"</i> <i>"Thank you for sharing how you are feeling with me. That took a lot of guts. I'd like to talk about this again soon if you think that would help. Can we talk again soon?"</i>	<i>"When you're with other kids at school, what have you done to take care of these feelings? How did that help you.... or them?"***</i> <i>"When you're with other teachers at school, what have you done to take care of these feelings? How did that help you....or them?***</i> [***affirm any positive coping strategies/strengths mentioned] <i>"Now let's talk about what we can do next time you feel like this again at school. What could you do in the classroom and at play times to help with these feelings? How can I, other teachers and kids at this school help you out when you have these feelings?"</i>
Consider referral to Pupil Service Staff			<i>"Together, let's work out who we might need to tell, and why, and how they might be able to help us out some more. What would you like them to know? Would you like to tell them about how you are feeling and what we've talked about?" Suggest other sources of support within the school and next steps...</i> <i>"Thank you very much for being so honest and sharing your feelings with me. That shows just how brave and strong you are. I know we can work this out. I will see you again onat.....(insert date and location). Is that okay with you?."</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Try to use "we" and "us" language as much as possible to minimize the student's feelings of isolation and alienation and maximize feelings of hope based on a team approach. ➤ Think about where might be the best place/s in the school for follow up discussions to occur. Ideally, the student would nominate their preference i.e. a space that would minimize visibility in front of peers or would they prefer a playground conversation under the guise of something 'lighter'/less stigmatizing i.e. homework follow-up? ➤ Work to preserve the trust, safety and faith they have placed in you and the help-seeking process at your school while at the same time looking for appropriate ways to connect with the parents/family. 		

FOLLOW CONNECTION PATHWAYS TO YOUR SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF then → ADMINISTRATOR

WHOLE CLASS STRATEGIES (Elementary School)

Encourage mental health promotion and peer support through social and emotional learning skills:

- teach social and emotional skills that help, encourage and affirm proactive relationship building and help-seeking (see CASEL's 5 core competences: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making).
- provide multiple opportunities for students to express these across different contexts and in different ways i.e. through the arts, in non-verbal and culturally diverse ways.
- normalize and encourage help-seeking for every student by asking them to nominate internal and external resources that might assist them in times of difficulty or challenge (see below).
- promote help-seeking amongst staff by displaying Employee Assistance Program details in staff/common room.



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- **Mental health difficulties for children** - https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/C4%20MH%20Information%20Sheets_Collated.pdf