



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

# RESOURCE

## Mental Health Literacy Talking Points for School Leaders

The following information includes common questions or concerns brought forward by school staff when engaging in professional development related to mental health literacy. This can help school leaders anticipate concerns that may arise, and be prepared to respond with information about the importance of mental health literacy for educators and their role in supporting student well-being.



**“Why do I need to have mental health literacy? Isn’t knowing about mental health the job of student services staff and community mental health providers?”**

### *Talking Points*

- Everyone in the school community plays a role in supporting student well-being, and mental health literacy provides staff with the knowledge and skills to play their specific role.
- These roles vary greatly, but regardless of role, everyone has a responsibility to create safe and inclusive classroom and school environments, understand their own mental health, and promote the mental health of their students. Mental health literacy helps all staff fulfill this responsibility.



**“I’m not a therapist, mental health literacy sounds like I’m being asked to be one.”**

### *Talking Points*

- Mental health literacy provides you with knowledge and skills in how to promote your own well-being, the well-being of students, decrease stigmatizing attitudes, and have supportive conversations with students when they are struggling. These skills are very aligned to your purpose and role in educating students.
- This is not the same as being a therapist. Therapists are trained in specific treatment modalities, implement psychosocial assessments, create treatment plans, etc. You are not being asked to do this. You are being asked to have the skills to promote well-being in your classroom and respond when a student needs you to listen, demonstrate empathy, affirm them, and connect them to someone who is trained to provide the support they need.



## **“How does mental health literacy benefit me personally and professionally?”**

### *Talking Points*

- You’re a person with mental health. Just like physical health, you need to know how to take care of your mental health in order to be healthy.
- A deeper understanding of mental health and how to promote it in the classroom can strengthen your relationship with students and help you build routines and structures that alleviate challenging student behaviors.
- It helps you identify signs of burnout and stress within yourself, so you can take proactive steps to maintaining a healthy work-life balance.
- “With good mental health literacy, we learn how to take better care of ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities. We are empowered and provided with the skills that we need to help us build better lives, better systems of care, and a better society” (Kutcher et. al 2018).



## **“I’m just not comfortable talking about mental health.”**

### *Talking Points*

- A person’s comfort with talking about mental health is impacted by many factors; identity, personal and professional experiences, attitudes about mental health, etc.
- This discomfort can be reinforced when people do not have a lot of experience talking about mental health, since it is not something that is always discussed openly. The best way to get comfortable is to start having conversations with people you trust.
- This discomfort can also stem from stigmatizing attitudes and beliefs that you might hold about mental health. It is important to examine and challenge these attitudes and beliefs in order to be an effective educator.



## **“If we just had more therapists and student services staff, we wouldn’t need to learn this stuff.”**

### *Talking Points*

- Schools can alleviate some of the strain created by student services and community mental health provider shortages by increasing the mental health literacy of all staff. With everyone working to proactively promote student well-being, the need for more time-intensive and costly support provided by trained mental health professionals is reduced.
- Mental health literacy is an important strategy for beginning to dismantle “top-heavy” systems of support, where more and more students are needing intensive intervention.

## References

Kutcher, Stan & Wei, Yifeng & Hashish, Mina. 2018. "Schools and Mental Health: Is Some Necessary Reexamining in Order?" 10.1007/978-3-319-89842-1\_6.



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