Dartmouth Health

Political Drivers of Health Symposium
December 16th, 2024

Breakout Session: *Youth Mental Health*

Notes

- Surgeon General Reports
  - 1999 raised awareness about youth mental health
  - 2023 SG warning against loneliness and isolation; loss of community, loss of play, increased sense that the world is dangerous
  - 2023 SG warning about social media and youth mental health
- COVID impacted the already rising rates of youth MH issues
  - 40% of high schoolers report depression; 15% have a plan to take their own lives
  - Youth mental health ED visit have gone from 7.7% to 13% of all emergency department visits
  - Females are at increased risk; national study showing that confidence has dropped
- Resources allocation
  - We are not putting 15% of our resources to youth mental health
  - There is a lack of parody and the medicare reimbursement rates are low
  - Community mental health centers are bare bones with their budgets
- Protective factors:
  - Social connections and belonging
  - Childcare
  - Medicaid and private insurance for the mental health needs of the population
- In New Hampshire
  - There are 15,000 12-17 yo with depression in NH
  - Of those, 56.6% did not receive any care last year
  - YRBS (Youth Behavior Risk Survey): 40% youth reported feeling sad or hopeless; this is down 4% from COVID, but still up 6% from where we were prior to COVID
  - Suicide for 10-14 yo is leading cause of death
  - 2023 17% of NH youth made a suicide plan (down from 19% from after COVID, but still up from 13% which is where we were prior to COVID)
  - Overall, a spike in depressive and suicide symptoms, numbers are still slightly elevated compared to before COVID
  - Gender gap (females report, attempt etc)
  - LGBTQ youth are at an elevated risk for suicidal ideations compared to heterosexual students (about double)
    - This is a result of the stigma and societal impacts. There is nothing inherently different about LGBTQ youth
    - LGBTQ youth report that wellbeing is being negatively impacted due to recent politics
    - When legislation is actually passed, in other states we have seen increases in suicide rates

- If we enact these anti-LGBTQ laws, we already know that there is going to be an increase in suicidal ideations because we have seen it.
- Many bills currently target LGBTQ in the NH
- Student population
  - Confidence is at a low, willingness to take risks is low
  - Social media and cancel culture leads to this culture
  - Bullying; there is no disconnect…when there is access via the internet you can't turn it off
    - It can be overwhelming
  - Inability to socially connect with others; smaller classrooms force them to be part of the class
  - Its difficult to have them disconnect from phones
- Impacts of phones
  - As a student having a phone is a privilege
  - Negatives
    - Can be distracting; harder to pay attention
    - Using technology to cheat… don't pay attention in class, need a quick fix so result can be cheating, increases access to ways to cheat
    - Less asking of teachers or classmates, but simply finding the easy fix
    - When no phones we rely on each other for company, more face to face interaction
    - Cyber bullying; poses a great threat on mental health
    - News spreads when people have their phones on them
    - No phones could make schools safer and more productive
  - Positives
    - Texting parents is one reason to permit phones; no connection may lead to anxiety etc
    - When used properly, phones are a great resource
  - Considerations
    - Phone restrictions: Some classrooms are phone free zones and teachers make students sign a contract
    - Can use a laptop to get around this
    - Phone ban would put additional stress on teachers for having to enforce bans
    - Are there students who don't have phones?
    - We know, everyone has a public persona… we all want to be perceived a certain way…
      - We also have a third, digital presence that teens are particularly sensitive to
      - When you have to manage all of these personas, its distracting and can cause anxiety
- Conflict resolution:
  - Easy to say mean things on the internet and just as easy to simply block someone who says something you don't agree with
    - Can this lead to inability to solve real conflicts?
  - "Restorative communication" → what was the conflict, how can we resolve it, and how do we move forward
  - Should we start having conversations about conflict resolution sooner?
    - The earlier we can start working on these skills the better
  - We want to put pressure on social media companies to not set up their platforms in a way that drives these behaviors
- Teaching how to use phones and social media;

- o As a school, it would be hard to implement… other options
    - ▪ Educating parents, and start with them first
    - ▪ Community wide public service announcements
    - ▪ Pediatricians educating parents during wellchild visits
  - o This starts early; its hard to think about kids doing something different when everyone around them is using social media, phones etc
  - o Maybe a mixed or clear policy… maybe not anti-cell phone, but pro human connection
  - o We could create tech-free zones or times of day as well as fostering in person gatherings
  - o There is a huge drop off in the amount of use of their phones when they start working or when they go to college
- Group specific concerns
  - o Particularly worried about boys; girls have higher rates, but boys report not answering honestly for fear of getting in trouble etc.
    - ▪ Do we allow boys the space to speak about feelings?
  - o Student athletes; this is a huge portion of the kids time and being in person with family can feel like more effort, more emotionally draining etc
- Family context
  - o Family skill building; some of the same pressures felt by students are felt by parents as well
  - o We only share the good things, creating a false sense of reality
  - o Parents don't always know how to broker handing off the skills to their kids, particularly when the kid goes to the real world
  - o We aren't even beginning to talk about the parents who have three jobs and don't even have the time for these conversations
- Kids are resilient but they need to be given the tools
  - o Kids are so busy… they have school, a job, a club, a sport
  - o Kids need to recognize school is first… If you feel overwhelmed something has to give and that thing is not school

Notes submitted by Bryan L'Heureux, edited by Seddon Savage

Resources:

- KFF: A Look at State Efforts to Ban Cellphones in Schools and Implications for Youth Mental Health
- NAMI: Social Media and Mental Health