

Mental Health in the Eyes of a Student

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Mental health, a long stigmatized topic, has never been as important as it is now. Covid-19 has caused hardships for everyone: through sickness, isolation, or loss of a loved one. With the amount of disconnect in our society right now, our mental health needs to be a priority. Our mental health affects our ability to think, process, and react to the world around us.

The Effects of Covid-19 on Mental Health

Covid-19 has created so much uncertainty in our everyday lives. With such drastic changes in our daily lives, Covid-19 makes us feel out of control of the simple aspects of our days. Even minor inconveniences such as worrying about forgetting a face mask or not being able to hug your friends can really shape our mental health. This makes more people at risk for developing mental illnesses like anxiety or depression. Anxiety can develop from emotional shock following a stressful event, like a global pandemic looming over our lives. Depression can be a side effect of the long period of isolation we have endured. Many people are diagnosed with these illnesses when those close to them notice a change in their behavior. However, quarantining and hybrid/remote learning situations make it harder to catch these changes in those we care about. Now, more than ever, we must be vigilant for symptoms of mental illnesses in the people around us.

As a student navigating Zoom classes, I know remote learning can be hard. With three other family members bustling throughout my household, I am paranoid about the camera and mute button. Even small things, like asking teachers to slow down their lectures or just asking a question, are a lot tougher in the remote environment. Since everything in our lives is just so different right now, it's hard to gain a sense of rhythm in our everyday lives. So we need to be there for one another in any way we can. During a normal school year, students and teachers develop a unique bond. This relationship can create trusted support systems which can really help those who are struggling with mental health.

Reaching out to students in a positive manner can really make them feel cared for. Sometimes it's tricky to do this in a way that doesn't further stress the student. As a student, I would recommend a few small gestures to show caring.

Ideas for Teachers

- **Check in During Class**

Instead of asking a student to stay after in class, find a time to check in during class without being obvious. Break out kids into small groups then go around and check in on each group.

- **Leave Time for Personal Life**

Make time in class to talk about students' personal lives. Ask if anyone is excited for upcoming plans or holidays. If you suspect a particular student needs extra attention, ask them to share something positive from their week.

- **Email Directly**

Email can be a beneficial way to communicate with a student who appears to be struggling. There's definitely a fine line not to cross, but by being friendly and non judgmental, email can allow a student to express their feelings in a non confrontational setting.

Ideas for Parents

- **Help Them Organize Their Plate**

Sometimes students feel so overwhelmed by school assignments that it's hard to know where to start. Help them organize and prioritize their assignments, so starting feels more manageable.

- **Communication is Everything**

During these stressful times, it's important to remind kids that they are not alone. Covid-19 has changed everyone's lives, so creating an environment where kids can express their struggles can help lower stress.

- **Be Thoughtful**

Sometimes even the smallest thing can make someone's day. Find an activity that they enjoy and make an evening of it. Taking a break can help alleviate stress and worries.

Due to the variety of symptoms, recognizing suicidal behavior can be difficult. A person who is developing suicidal thinking could have a variety of symptoms, or just one. Signs of suicidal behavior can include:

- withdrawal from others
- mood swings
- feelings of guilt or being a burden
- struggling with self-harm or trauma
- taking risks
- saying goodbye
- rage
- sadness
- making a plan or preparations
- seeking revenge
- changing in appearance
- feeling trapped

Educating yourself is a great first step in suicide prevention. If someone you know is exhibiting any of the above symptoms, reach out and help them get the support they need. Even if you are unsure, you should reach out about their mental health. If untreated, mental illnesses can leave people at higher risk to develop suicidal thinking. However having a mental illness does not mean a person will develop suicidal thinking.

While always important, mental health is incredibly critical to our overall well-being during Covid-19. With the additional stress of hybrid/remote learning and quarantining, many students are struggling to keep their mental health in a good place. Caring gestures from teachers, administrators, and parents can help ease this stress by making special connections with students.