

## Ep. 2 (2/2) Adolescent Mental Health Part 2

It's always a good sign that adolescence mental health has started getting more attention. However, fears about confidentiality, public stigma peer pressure, a desire to be self reliant and a lack of awareness of mental health problems and mental health services are still largely preventing adolescence from seeking help.

Someone will in community will go on to the internet to share their sad experience, like saying that they have depression, they are really hopeless, but there always someone saying that they are not true, they're like saying some bad words like they're just acting. And in our class seems like everyone is being very happy and they have no pressure. And even some students, they don't have very good grades, they are always arguing with their teacher and teacher always punish them. I think they really got great pressure but they are still not trying changing it or not to show out. I think it becomes the main reason that there are only a few teenagers are willing to talk their problems to other people. They choose to shy away from it and not to talk with a teacher, not like actively showing this problem. My friend, she has a depression. She told me once if she go out, she will never tell others she has depression. She will act like a normal person. She repeatedly tells this problem. she really wants these things change a little bit.

I think there's a stigma in my school and my community because there is a curse in Chinese that said 神经病 and that's a very really serious curse to use on somebody. Once our mental health teacher told us that one of her previous students found out that one of another student was diagnosed with some mental illness. I think it's depression. And she just ran into the teachers office and shouted to the entire office. This boy or girl has some mental health problem and it just didn't did a lot of harm to the girl. What are mental health teacher told us. I think there is a stigma around it in my school. I think you can have some serious

effect because if they go to use mental health therapy then other students would say this guy is a bit insane. Keep away from it. And that isn't very good.

In our deep-rooted cultural stigma, having a mentally ill relative is regarded as something that might bring shame to the family. The negative stereotypes about mentally ill groups can be weak, less resilient, crazy or even dangerous. The prejudice and the discrimination against these groups result in fear, exclusion, bullying or even malicious harm. The stigma gets in the way while China has been trying to enhance the education of adolescent mental health for years. How can we break the stigma? I say, let's start with talking about mental health OPENLY.

Our students spend most of their time either taking classes at the school or finishing assignments from school. With such an occupied schedule, should the students get mental health days off from school?

I think we should because mental health day off can give us enough rest and we will have more vigor in study. We can get rid of our bad feelings and emotions in the day off time.

I think students should get mental health days off from school because for example, I am a student. Most of the time, I did feel very stressed after whole days and every day's continuing classes. And at the same time during those school days, we take tests and we compared to each other. I did feel very stressed.

Yes, a classmate of mine died of psychological problems last year. If the school gives students a little time to adjust themselves, maybe there will be less tragedy, but also let students more optimistic. Students will be more efficient in doing other things.

I think students should get a day off from school because students are always staying at school and they have study all the time and if they don't have a day off to set out their self and refresh, they might feel a lot of stress. Like they are being always worried about their test grade and how their classmate feeling about them and how their teacher feeling about them and how their future becoming. Like this kind of thought can make a really huge pressure.

I think so. They should get days off. Because taking a mental health day off and help students to relieve stress. It can adjust their mindset, regain balance and provide necessary space and time for them to process their emotions. During this time. They can also visit like a counselor, a professional psychologist or confide in an adult if they are comfortable to do so or if it is suitable, it can also take days off to relax and invest time in their hobbies like I do.

Well, if we have these mental health days off , you can help them reset. But on the other hand, if they leave school for some time, they may left behind their classmates and because of that their grades might go down a bit and they may not be that happy and their mental health situation may worse.

What will you do if you have this mental health day off?

I will relax myself. I will go for a trip with my family, read a book or just sleep for a whole day.

I will find my friends and I want to do some drawing. I will go to ski. I will have some lunch with my friends.

I will do things whatever I want. For example, I will read books and go to watch movies with my friends.

What about teachers who spent most of the time dealing with the students?  
What did they think of this?

Yes, I think so, but I doubt the feasibility of it. On the one hand, it is important to focus on their mental health because it influences their study efficiency, learning motivation, and even life safety. For instance, one day when I was marking their homework, I found a boy wrote his work indiscriminately for he just wrote some incorrect letters without any notes on the text. After I pointed out the problem, he had no emotion and said nothing. He didn't give any reflection. It was that time I noticed he might have some mental problems. I told his parents and they sent him to the hospital and then I was sure. I didn't remember his diagnosis but it might not be very serious because when he took a short break before he went back to school, he became active in my class and more careful on his homework. Besides the case near me, there are also a lot of incidents about students who commit suicide because of heavy pressure or even depression. Thus, it is necessary to give them a break. However, on the other hand, we cannot control when they feel overwhelmed and decide to give them a period to relax. As a reference, if they are free to take a break, it negatively influences teaching plans from the perspectives of teacher. Also, they might not catch up with other classmates because of their absence.

I find that today's students are quite different from those in the past, especially in their mental state. Maybe they are faced with too much pressure. Now, more and more students suffer from mental problems. They can't concentrate on their studies. They look tired and sleepy in class and some of them get angry easily. Therefore their grades are not satisfactory and this in turn increases their anxiety. As teachers, we are puzzled. We don't know how to help such students. In fact, any improper method may do harm to them. You asked me whether students should get mental health days or from school. My answer is yes. In this way, they can make necessary adjustments. They can have a rest and relax themselves which helps them study in a more positive way. And at the same time promote the mental health of more students.

I totally agree that students should have mental health days off. The first reason I always say is the academic pressure. And I think students spend a lot of time and energy on homework and exams every day and they also need to do a lot of training on weekends when they're supposed to enjoy their own life. Lack of sleep quality can also affect students' mental health. You know, the Chinese pandemic prevention policy has been a disaster for most Children I would say. Online courses took up like most of the time. There's no time for students to meet classmates, friends or teachers in person on campus, to make friends face to face, to participate any sports activities. Many Children become addicted into online world. So in December last year when Children began to slowly return to school, many issues began to come to the fore. I find that many Children who are very lively before have become silent and reluctant to chat with their friends, their classmates or even teachers. So maybe that's the reason why I agree that students should have mental health days off.

I think students should be allowed to take mental health days off as everybody knows that Chinese children are really too tired due to their heavy academic workloads and all kinds of after-school activities. First of all, all students, as we all know right, live for actual long school hours each day. what's worse as we can see, all school children are overburdened with schoolwork. At school, you can often see even during break, many students are still busy doing their homework and this homework seems to never end. And some students often have to go to bed after midnight to finish their homework. I think many of those who sleep in classes are really just too tired and not lazy. Some teachers tend to use frequent exams to put pressure on students, forcing them to lose interest in anything other than learning and achieving better grades. In high school I teach, there are three exams a week for the non graduating classes and for the graduating classes, of course, more intense. Students have to take six exams and the exam results are counted and ranked every week. I guess many students are on the verge of breakdown even for those best ranked students. In addition, the various kinds of test preparation classes, talent classes on weekends occupied almost all free time of children leaving them no time and room to relax and play. And the

children have to continue a state of tension on weekends and you know what, nobody likes this situation, not Children, not even their parents. Almost all the parents I know complain about this, but due to the peer pressure, no one is wanting to be the first one to withdraw from the competition. I'm not trying to dig the reason behind this. What I'm trying to say is that I believe this, if not the only one, it must be and it may be the major reason that caused great physical and the psychological harm to our children. There may be other, more effective ways and I truly believe a strong macro measures should be put in place to change this situation. But for now, the students enjoy a mental vacation without homework. I do think it's worth trying and it's worth doing.

Unlike my generation, nowadays the parents are involved more than ever in their kids school work. Almost every parent has one Wechat or QQ group in which they are informed of test scores, homework requirements or their kids performance at the school. The stress is shared. So how will they answer this question?

Personally, I would very much like to have a holiday. We have also felt difficult in his study such as difficulties in keeping up with the progress of school. Plus every night to stay up later to write homework and brush up on questions. The whole learning state has become very unstable. Parents and children get along with the model of tension. As a parent. I also feel very helpless. He did not understand the class led to my own psychological pressure. Stay up late every day led to physical health is also declining and even to a small operation. The doctor told me not to be angry. I will ask for leave with his school teachers. It's not about taking our vacation. It's about getting a private tutor to help him keep up with school and build his confidence. Private teachers class is very relaxing. The teacher is humorous. The class is also wonderful. For him, to me, is a kind of relaxation.

I certainly support the mental health day off from schools. This is great for schools, families and especially for students. The academic pressure of student today is far greater than that of my time. My daughter is very curious, full of

interest in the world. She loves skiing, swimming, dancing, shopping in bookstores, playing the piano, doing embroidery, building Lego, but all of these hobbies are halted because of her busy school life. This is the current situation of most students. It is even difficult for them to make friends of the same age other than their classmates. My daughter doesn't want to say and I never ask. I really want to talk about grades, friends issues and even some emotional problems with her. If a student can develop new skills or improve their communication skill, it is no less important than improving their grades. And I support any opportunity for them to take a break.

Well, I think yes. You know, nowadays, more and more students have different mental problems. For example, some students like to be alone and don't want to talk to anybody. Some are addicted to video games or network virtual world. Some can't even sleep the whole day and the whole night. I think most of the mental problems have severely affected their normal lives. So I think having mental health days could be helpful to the students because they could have a chance to take a break from what they are currently suffering. Maybe they could do something that they can't do at a school like going hiking or lying on bed for whole days without thinking anything. Um, just let their mind go.

I don't think Children under pressure can solve their mental health issue by taking a day off. Because unlike physical pain, mental illness is difficult to identify and heal. General speaking, mental stress and the districts are not formed in the short term. It is affected by many complex factors in a relatively long-term process that can eventually lead to the current situation. So taking a day rest to treat the pressure. I don't think it is a complete solution.

I think students have the right to get mental health days off from school, and they should leave from school for a rest, when they have mental health problem. As we know, People can recover from tiredness and sickness by having sufficient rest and sleep. So I think students can also improve their mental health by taking a break from stress and pressure of homework, exams and so on.

I believe adolescent mental health has been increasingly recognized by the public while stigma is like an invisible force that holds it back. I'm glad our interviewees feel comfortable talking about it and are so honest with us. Like I said, that's the first step. Normalize mental health, let our kids know it's okay to be not okay. Additionally, there is a lot that adolescents can do to help themselves and help each other to maintain their mental health. Share with the trustworthy friends and listen to each other without lecturing or judging. Sincerely give suggestions when someone under the whether it needs it. They also expect parents to hear their voices.

Parents...I think they should encourage their children often. I want my parents to encourage more. If I do very well on one test and I want them to tell me I do very well and maybe can give some gifts like this. And if I do not very well, I want them don't compare me with others very often.

I have never taken days off because of my mental health situation. So I didn't think of that as an option. But now that I reflect on it, maybe I needed like days off to just relax and calm myself down from all the things that are happening around me in school.

I just think parents should care more about them. Not so professionally, really serious talking, asking them how your school is like or how you feel, not so serious and it makes the kids feel anxious and nervous like having a test.

Parents are among the most important people in the lives of their children. It is critical that they help them identify issues and seek support when needed. Because compared to adults, children and adolescents are more likely to keep it quiet.

You know, When we talk about a mental problem, we know that it is already a result. Shouldn't we think carefully about why it happened, can we do something



to improve it? At least, don't make it worse. I think the meaning of Mental Health Days is not taking off from school for students, it should be a reminder to parents about what improvement we can make. Try to grow with kids on the mental, treat them as friends. Try to build more common topics through different ways like watching movie together, going shopping together. Just do not try to control them but give them enough respect and make them feel a sense of security.

It is necessary to take further strategies and even treatment to help teenagers overcome difficulties and improve their mental health. I believe that parents and teachers can cooperate. For example, Parents and teachers can pay attention to students' mental state together and share the information about symptoms of their mental health problem. And It will be helpful that students can learn some skills to manage stress and difficult emotions at school. Besides, Parents need to encourage their children to consult and seek help from the teachers in charge of psychological consultation, and even from professional psychologists. Don't make them feel it is embarrassing to do that. As a father, I really care about my daughter's mental health. I understand that heavy learning tasks and fierce competition in school are significant source of stress for her, and it could be harmful to her mental health. But I think this is a systematic problem. It can not be resolved in a short time. So, what I can do now is to pay more attention to my daughter's psychological state. I drive to pick up her every day, and we chat like friends in our way home. We talk about some topics about study and life, so I get a chance to learn about her mental state. Is she anxious? Or why is she unhappy? If she has any problems, I can work with her to find a solution. And I am trying my best to create a relaxed environment for her. In her spare time, I encourage her to play video games, chat with her friends or go outside. And I would like to take her to the concert of her favorite singer that I am not interested in.

I think it should be the responsibility of parents and teachers to look after children's mental health, as they are the closest people who are in contact with the children every day. Of course, their responsibility is not to help children

recover from their mental situation as soon as possible, but to find the problems. When problems are found, children should be taken to consult in time or given professional help.

In previous years of my life when I often faced difficult situations. I vented or complained. In fact, such negative emotions led to a very tense relationship between me and my child for a long period of time.

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After that we discovered God and both went to church. In the church. she didn't study as a teenager and I didn't study as an adult. We got an instead into each other's lives and struggles in church, even though we haven't become christian yet, we both think that many of the bible uh, sayings guide us the actions. We use these ideas to solve the problems in our lives, which is very helpful. Since then our relationships has improved significantly and our mental stress has decreased a lot. As parents, we should be mentally healthy first. If we are not mentally healthy or under great pressure, we cannot find out whether our children are mentally healthy or not, let alone help them get rid of trouble of their own.

However, there's still so much we should do to further break this stigma and profoundly improve the situation. As the younger generation, they have something to say about it.

I think school should know more students feelings, always ask them how they feel, give them less pressure and study, don't give them extra work to do.

Well I think the school should emphasize more about mental health problems and they need to let students know that if they need any help, they can just go for help.

It's great for parents to love their children and listen to their opinions. Schools and society should build trust with students and take their suggestions into an account.

I think I would change the fact that you have to be a counselor when you are experiencing these problems. I mean it is your choice, but I would like to have like a wide variety of people to talk to instead of just other students or counselors because they might not understand our situation as well as we do ourselves and students with similar situations might not relate to us as much as maybe a professional psychologist or in general, other types of mental health workers would understand us. And in fact, they are already really well-trained, I've been there multiple times and the counselors, they are great at listening and trying to suggest for solutions to your problems. But sometimes I just need someone to listen and relate instead of having solutions to my problems.

We should have mental health classes more frequently because we had about one mental health class every week in primary school, but now it's two weeks. One in every two weeks. We do forget a lot of things, you know.

Less homework and or less test and I also want to advise the school that they can have more bricks. Teacher can separate the students into different classrooms and do a survey. Write on the paper. Like nobody will pick your answer and it's a really private thing. Teachers should encourage their students to write down the true thinking because some students, because of the shyness, they are still can't talk with the teacher face to face.

Mental health is important at every stage of life from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. I hope this episode can get as started learning and talking about mental health. I do wish our students could get mental health days off to reset and recharge themselves without worrying or feeling embarrassed. At the end of the day. We're humans. We all need a break, don't we?

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