

The classroom environment has changed over the past few years. Pandemic toll.

We want our students to succeed but need our support. Achieve goals. The mental support is lacking and needed.

Providing mental health awareness and strategies = good.

***Today = why mental health is important in the classroom, warning signs and who to turn to if you notice something wrong, what we as teachers can do to encourage stronger mental health awareness in our schools and classrooms.***

**Why is it important? It's killing our students!**

Suicide = 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for our students depending

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION 2017 - LBGQ youth, they are more than twice as likely to feel suicidal and over four times as likely to attempt suicide compared to their straight counterparts. Additionally, transgender youth are far more likely than their non-transgender peers to experience depression. According to a 2016-2017 survey from the Human Rights Campaign, 28 percent of LGBTQ youth (including 40 percent of trans youth) said they felt depressed most or all of the time during the previous 30 days, compared to only 12 percent of non-LGBTQ youth (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2017). This doesn't even address race, which if we are looking at a well-known statistic, trans people of color are even more likely to be victims of suicide and homicide.

Numbers → Warning signs + Reporting

We want students to be in tip top shape. but.

Mental Health . Gov:

- a. Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks. (I would go as far as to say if they have a bad week and come back over the weekend just as bad or worse, I would intervene.)
- b. Seriously trying to harm oneself or others or making plans to do so. Beginning to show signs of violent or out-of-control behavior that could cause harm to themselves or others or general increase of aggressiveness.
- c. Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart or fast breathing. Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities.
- d. Not eating, throwing up, or using laxatives to make oneself lose weight.
- e. Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still that puts the student in physical danger or causes problems in the classroom.
- f. Use of drugs or alcohol. g. Severe mood swings or erratic behavior that cause problems in relationships. h. Drastic changes in the student's behavior or personality (MentalHealth.gov, 2019).

We can't help everyone – Mental health . gov says to reach out.

What else can we do? We can encourage a mental wellbeing in our classrooms.

Us English teachers have an advantage – literature. Check out Confessionalist poetry (Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, etc.)

Small additions, according to Madeline Taylor, a people skills consultant, she has a few strategies you can try: Feeling of the Week to develop a stronger language of feelings, expecting children to notice and name empathy when demonstrated by others, developing games that build skills to read faces and body language, fostering cognitive empathy through literature and role playing, foster multiculturalism, support children and the parent community to find what they have in common amongst all that is different, have jobs for children to carry out in the classroom, have rules of expected behavior and politeness, teach non-verbal cues, and report on empathy, persistence, and delayed gratification in school reports

We can also do activities: According to Everfi (explain each) – mental health dialogue, brain breaks, stopping the stigma (by doing art projects supporting mental health awareness), Mental Health Check-ins, mood tracker, positive post-its (my personal favorite)

With online learning, a lot of these activities are harder to do now, so I found some more activities you can do over virtual learning. We'll be doing one of them at the end of class.

Conclude: Mental wellbeing is a priority for our students, whether they realize it or the teachers or parents realize it. According to Reference. com, We spend 15 percent of our lifetime in school from K-12. As teachers we can encourage students to take care of themselves and their mental wellbeing or find solutions if they aren't able to help themselves.

We do have an obligation to making our students feel safe, appreciated, and welcomed in our classrooms. I do want to counter that by saying we don't have an obligation to be a counselor or therapist! Know your boundaries!

As we continue to push through this global pandemic, adjust and readjust to guidelines, and try to help our students achieve their dreams, our students' mental wellbeing has taken a toll, as with most people. Adapting the classroom to provide a secure and warm environment as much as possible may allow students to work through tougher times and come out a stronger human being and help them get that much closer to their goals.