

So, What's the Deal About Youth Mental Health in Our Schools Today?

By Chris Combass | Posted in May 2019



Just the other day, I was having a conversation with someone who I had not seen in a while, and as I was sharing information on the great initiatives occurring within the realm of school safety, I was asked the following question: "So what is the deal with all of this mental health talk in schools today?" I was definitely quick to respond since this is a topic that is near and dear to my heart. The fact of the matter is that when I graduated high school "a long time ago," mental health was a topic that was just not frequently discussed. Of course, everyone knew about the typical teenage behaviors which were exhibited, and I know that the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders among youth in America were there, but I just wasn't looking for them.

As I roll forward to society today, a lot has changed. Enhancements in technology and communication have provided a gateway to instant knowledge, both good and bad, for today's youth. Of course, acquisition of this "data overload" along with increased pressures from topics such as standardized tests, college admissions, peer pressure, traumatic events, and social media, just to name a few, seem to have taken their toll on adolescents. Signs and symptoms of anxiety, behavior, and substance abuse disorders as well as others are prevalent in our world today. The good news is that, for the most part, our youth are resilient. In most cases, they are able to overcome those obstacles and roadblocks that stand in their way, and they are able to lead healthy and productive lives. Much of their resilience can be attributed to us. Whether we serve as parents, community members, clergy, teachers, or other important roles, we provide necessary protective factors which are vital to the success of our young people. It is important that we provide an essential support system, consistent routine, and good problem skills for our loved ones.

Youth Mental Health First Aid is a course that teaches participants how to recognize the signs and symptoms associated with mental health disorders. Although it will not qualify someone to diagnose an illness, it does create an awareness of potential issues. I don't know if you remember the commercial from a few years ago where a guy solves a complex problem and was asked "How did you do it professor?" He said, "Oh no, I am not a professor, I just stayed at a Holiday Inn Express last night." Youth Mental Health First Aiders are not going to approach someone and diagnose them with a Bipolar Disorder because they attended a 6-hour training. What they will be able to do is to recognize certain signs and symptoms which may be associated with a mental health disorder, and they will have a complete understanding of how to contact the appropriate help needed. By increasing awareness of mental health issues in schools, we hope to prevent major issues before they occur, decrease the negative stigmas often attached, and promote resiliency among our youth which will, in return, support positive learning environments conducive to student learning. So, knowing all of this, I guess the question that we should be asking ourselves instead is "Why not mental health in schools today?" For more information regarding Youth Mental Health or Hamilton County School Safety Advisory Council initiatives, e-mail chris.combass@hamiltonfl.com.