Social Emotional Learning: An Effective Model for School-Based Mental Health

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Introduction:
Emotional regulation is of significant clinical pertinence in child and adolescent psychiatry (CAP). We strive to optimize this in patients through a variety of interventions, both pharmacologically and therapeutically. Due to access and equity issues, and the importance of early intervention from a neurodevelopmental perspective, schools are an ideal location for interventions. This presentation will focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a comprehensive and universal prevention-focused intervention, with an emphasis on the Pyramid Model, as an evidence-based framework.

Neurodevelopmental Factors:
Emotion and cognition are closely linked
- Synaptic Pruning
- Balance Shift
- Negativity Bias
- Optimal Learning Environment

What is Social Emotional Learning?
Process through which children and adults gain knowledge and skills to:
- Recognize/manage emotions
- Demonstrate empathy for others
- Develop positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions
- Set and achieve positive goals
- Behave ethically and respectfully

The Five Core Competencies are a set of tools that:
- Promote intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence
- Create positive climate and culture in the classroom, school, and community
- Provide foundation for better academic performance, fewer conduct problems, and less emotional distress

[School] Systems of Care Issue:
- The ACEs study showed us that early maltreatment matters
- Neurobiology and clinical experience teaches us that early intervention matters too
- The prevalence of mental disorders in CAP is high, while access to equitable treatment is low

Onset of mental illness:
- 50% by age 14
- 75% by age 24

Prevalence/Burden of mental illness:
- 1 in 5 youth live with a mental illness
- Suicide is 3rd leading cause of death in ages 10-24
- 50% of adolescents with serious emotional disturbances drop out of HS

The school system is the sole provider of MH treatment for nearly half of children with serious emotional issues who actually receive MH services
Youth are 6X more likely to complete MH treatment in schools than in community settings

Formula for Success:
Trauma-informed, Culturally-competent, Resiliency-promoting, Universal prevention focused, & Evidence-based:
Higher academic achievement, less intensive services, higher social and occupational functioning, less psychological distress, fewer costs or burdens to larger systems of care

Multi-tiered System of Support:
A coherent continuum of evidence-based system-wide practices to support a timely response to academic and behavioral needs, using data-based decision-making to empower students to exceed great expectations

Evidence-based Intervention:

2017 follow-up Meta-analysis:
Statistically significant associations between SEL skills in kindergarten and future outcomes in employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health, regardless of SES, race, school location

Specific examples:
Project AWARE (SAMHSA), MH 101, RULER (Yale), Primary Project…

References
1. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) website
2. National Center for School Mental Health website

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