

# Mental Health Instruction in Schools



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

## Mental Health in Education Summit

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Albany Law School

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## Mental Health Instruction in Schools

- Mental Health in Health Curricula: Historical Context
- Mental Illness Prevalence and Need
- Mental Health Literacy
- Advocacy for Mental Health Education in New York Schools
- Legislative Language



## The Mental Hygiene Movement

The National Committee for Mental Hygiene was founded in New York in 1909:

1. By a number of leading psychiatrists and
2. Clifford W. Beers (1876–1943),
  - Institutionalized in several mental hospitals;
  - He described his experiences and the deplorable conditions in mental hospitals in his autobiography *A Mind That Found Itself* (1913).



## The Mental Hygiene Movement

The National Committee aimed to:

- Improve conditions in mental hospitals
- Stimulate research in psychiatry
- Improve the quality of psychiatric education
- Develop measures preventing mental illness
- Popularize psychiatric and psychological perspectives.



Mental Health America (MHA) – founded in 1909 – is the nation's leading community-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and to promoting the overall mental health of all Americans.



Maryland Gov. Theodore McKeldin and Mrs. A. Felix DuPont in 1953 pour the metal made from melted chains used to restrain people with mental illnesses to create the Mental Health Bell.



In 1928, the *Sixth Yearbook* of the Department of Superintendents of the National Education Association outlined the following content guidelines for health education:

- **Mental hygiene must be emphasized and protected;**
- The establishment of health habits depends upon the pupil's understanding something of the function of his own body;
- A discussion of the causes of disease merits a place in the secondary school program;
- A thorough study of nutrition should be placed in the upper grades.
- Posture should be emphasized.
- The hygiene of the home should be taught.
- Sex hygiene cannot be overlooked.



Throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the temperance movement also had an influence on school health programs, stressing that children should learn about the effects of alcohol, tobacco, and narcotics on the human system.



These daily chores were as follows:

1. Wash hands before each meal; clean fingernails.
2. Brush teeth after breakfast and the evening meal.
3. Carry handkerchief and use it to protect others when coughing or sneezing.
4. Avoid accidents; look both ways when crossing the street.
5. Drink four glasses of water, but no tea, coffee, or any harmful drink.
6. Eat three wholesome meals; drink milk.
7. Eat some cereal or bread, green (watery) vegetable and fruit, but no candy or "sweets" unless at the end of the meal.
8. Go to the toilet at regular times.
9. Sit and stand straight.
10. Spend 11 hours in bed, with windows open.
11. Have a complete bath and rub yourself dry.



## School Health Education Study (1960s)

Defined health as a dynamic, multidimensional entity and outlined instructional content areas:

- Human growth and development;
- Personal health practices;
- Accidents and disease;
- Food and nutrition;
- Mood-altering substances, and;
- Role of the family in fulfilling health needs.



## Prevalence of Mental Illness in the United States

- Mental Illness is Common
- 1 in 4 people in the United States will have a diagnosed mental illness over the course of a year — approximately 61.5 million people
- 18.2% have an Anxiety Disorder
- 6.8 % have a Major Depressive Disorder
- 6% have a serious mental illness
- 20% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have PTSD and/or depression  
*(RAND Study)*
- In long-term care facilities, 43% of residents have depression  
*- American Health Care Association*



## Mental Illness Often Begins Early in Life

- Half of all chronic mental health conditions begin by age 14
- Half of all lifetime cases of Anxiety Disorders begin as early as age 8
- 22 % of Youth Aged 13-18 experience serious mental disorders in a given year *(NIMH)*



## The Damage: Treatment Delays in Youth Impact Critical Stage of Life

- Over 60% of young adults with a mental illness were unable to complete high school
- Transitional Age Youth with mental illness are 4 times less likely to be involved in gainful activities (e.g. employment, college or trade school), and...
- Those with a psychiatric disability are three times more likely to be involved in criminal justice activities
- Nationally, each year, approx. 157,000 youth between 10 and 24 y.o.a. receive medical care for self-inflicted injuries at Emergency Departments across the U.S.
- 1 in 12 high school students have attempted suicide - *semi-annual survey on youth risk behavior published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*



## Why do we have this problem?

### Significant barriers to people getting help....

1. General lack of knowledge about mental illness;
2. Myths, misunderstanding and fear;
3. Stigma, shame & embarrassment;
4. Lack of availability of timely treatment;
5. We have not done as good a job from a public health point of view regarding mental health as we've done with other public health challenges such as cancer, diabetes and AIDs for example



## Mental Health Literacy

Mental Health Literacy – Is an extension of Health Literacy and is defined as “knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention” – Jorm, A.F. et al (1997)

*Jorm, A. F. (2011, October 31). Mental Health Literacy: Empowering the Community to Take Action for Better Mental Health. American Psychologist. Advance online publication.*



## Mental Health Literacy

- The ability to recognize specific disorders;
- Knowledge of how to seek mental health information
- Knowledge of risk factors and causes
- Knowledge of self-treatments and available professional help
- Knowledge of attitudes that promote recognition and appropriate help-seeking behavior

*Jorm, A. F. (2011, October 31). Mental Health Literacy: Empowering the Community to Take Action for Better Mental Health. American Psychologist. Advance online publication.*



## Mental Health Literacy Research Findings:

- Increase in the proportion of students willing to seek help from professional sources
- Significant improvements in students' (and their parents', friends' and neighbors') awareness of mental health issues
- Significant increases in knowledge and attitudes





## Mental Health Instruction in Schools

New York State Education Law  
Article 17 - (801 - 816) Instruction in Certain Subjects  
Section 804 subdivisions (1) and (6)(c)



- \* § 804. Health education regarding **mental health**, alcohol, drugs, tobacco abuse and the prevention and detection of certain cancers. 1. **All schools shall ensure that their health education programs recognize the multiple dimensions of health by including mental health and the relation of physical and mental health so as to enhance student understanding, attitudes and behaviors that promote health, well-being and human dignity.**
2. All schools shall include, as an integral part of health education, instruction so as to discourage the misuse and abuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and promote attitudes and behavior that enhance health, well being, and human dignity...



c. The regents shall review the health curriculum requirements in existence on the effective date of this paragraph for the purpose of streamlining such curriculum and identifying any outdated components that may be eliminated or consolidated in order to ensure that students have sufficient time and instruction to develop skills to address issues of violence prevention and mental health. To the extent appropriate, the regents shall modify the existing curriculum to provide greater focus on the development of skills, by no later than middle school, that are needed to recognize, cope with and address potentially violent incidents including an understanding of [student's] student roles in emergency situations [what to do when confronted with another student who is experiencing a mental health problem] and other related skills designed to reduce the threat of violence in schools.



## Supporting Mental Health & Wellness in Schools

Visit us at [MHANYS.org](http://MHANYS.org) today!



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