



Setting Standards of Excellence One Child at a Time.

MIDWEST CENTER FOR YOUTH & FAMILIES  
AND SOUTH SHORE ACADEMY



South Shore Academy

# KidsMatter Newsletter

November 2009

## Schools Play a Critical Role in Mental Health



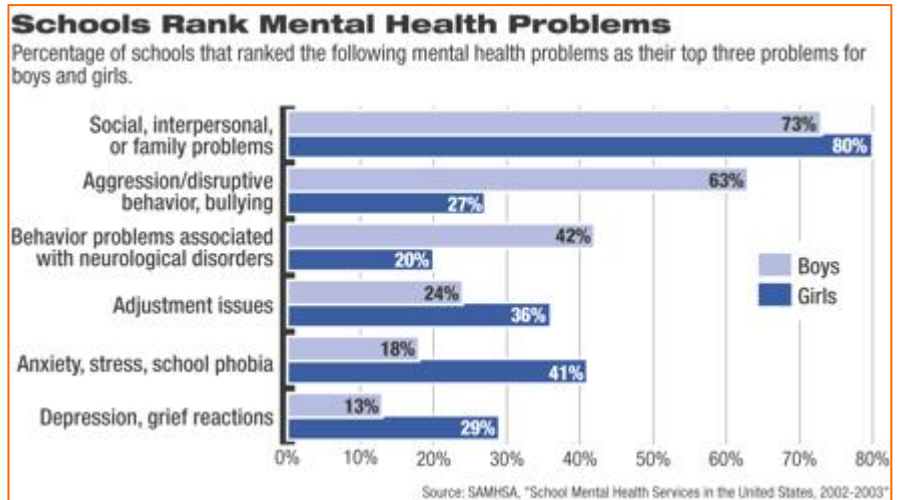
*“There’s a child in my class I can’t seem to reach. I think he has symptoms of a mental illness. I care a lot about this child and am afraid if we don’t get him help, we will lose him.”* Classroom Teacher

Every day, teachers enter their classrooms to teach young minds, but are faced with many challenges that make their jobs very difficult. One of those challenges includes identifying and managing children in need of mental health services. Here are some startling statistics that contribute to the many challenges our educators face:

- 3,000,000 cases of child abuse and neglect were reported in this country last year and 2,000 children died as a result of that abuse. The others suffered in different ways. They endured emotional trauma. They were less likely to be ready for school-- more likely to have behavior problems, become teen parents, juvenile delinquents, drug and alcohol abusers, or worse, child abusers themselves. A series of reports on child abuse suggests that 9 out of 10 cases of child abuse still go unreported.
- Approximately 20 percent of children and adolescents in the U.S. reported experiencing symptoms of a mental health problem and 5 percent reported experiencing “extreme functional impairment”. One in five children and adolescents suffers from a mental disorder of some kind and one in 10 children has a serious emotional disorder that affects his or her ability to function daily.
- Slightly more than 28 percent of students admitted to feeling so sad or hopeless for two or more continuous weeks over the past 12 months that they stopped doing some usual activities.
- The dropout rate for students with severe emotional and behavioral problems is nearly two times higher than it is for other students.
- Four out of five children who need mental health services do not receive them. Untreated mental health problems in children can cause negative and oftentimes tragic long-term consequences. Some of these consequences include dropping out of high school, substance abuse, a lack of vocational success, an inability to live and function independently, health problems and suicide.

Teachers and guidance counselors, by virtue of their jobs and amount of time spent with children daily, naturally become a front line of defense for all of this. A nationwide survey of U.S. public schools found that 87 percent of schools made mental health services available to all students. An average of 20 percent of students at each school received some type of school-supported mental health.

SAMHSA has gathered information on the characteristics of mental health services in schools. And, schools rank mental health problems as being anywhere from social problems, to aggression or bullying at school, or anxiety and stress—with social, interpersonal or family problems ranking the highest in prevalence. *(Continued on Page 2)*



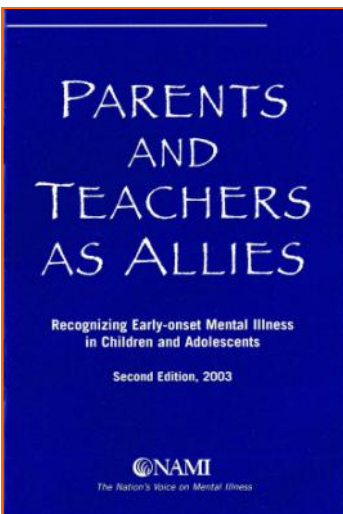
## Schools Play a Critical Role in Mental Health (Continued)

SAMHSA states, “Taking action to address childhood mental health problems now can save lives, especially when school personnel identify children and intervene appropriately, before they develop significant problems.” We believe that it is important to see our local school system as the front line of defense for identifying the need for mental health services for children and adolescents. They can also introduce students to mental health issues in a nonthreatening manner. A report found that more than 80 percent of schools provided assessment for mental health problems, behavioral consultation, and crisis intervention, as well as referrals to specialized programs. These specialized programs may include outpatient services, substance abuse treatment, day treatment or residential services. Regardless of gender, they found that adolescents and children referred to substance abuse treatment by the schools were more likely than those referred by the criminal justice system to report alcohol abuse. They were also more likely to refer themselves to treatment for the first time (88 vs. 68 percent).

“We extend our support and kudos to all the educators in the community who daily enter their class rooms to enrich our children’s minds--and look out for their well-being.”

Roberta Ullery-Coombs,  
Director of Education  
Midwest Academy

At Midwest Center for Youth and Families, we provide state accredited education and the therapeutic support children and adolescents with mental illness require for making positive life-altering changes in their behaviors, way of interacting with peers and coping with their mental illness. We extend our support and kudos to all the educators in the community who daily enter their class rooms to enrich our children’s minds--and look out for their well-being.



NAMI has published a wonderful resource for parents and teachers who are caring for children and adolescents struggling with mental illness. We have a limited number of copies available for those in the community interested in reading the publication.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of *Parents and Teachers as Allies—Recognizing Early-onset Mental Illness in Children & Adolescents*, please contact Kim Lahman, Director of Business Development:

Phone: (866) 629-3471 or Email: [Kim.Lahman@UHSinc.com](mailto:Kim.Lahman@UHSinc.com)

## Fighting the War against Mental Illness . . . One Day at a Time



Rick Spencer, a 21 year military veteran, knows from experience what fighting a war really means. As a 14 year veteran working with kids with mental illness, he also knows that fighting the war against mental illness is just as serious. He has worked for Midwest Center for Youth and Families for five years and is currently the day shift staff supervisor for the Behavioral Health Care Workers (BHWs) who daily assist kids with completing their ADLs, getting ready for school, attending therapeutic groups and therapy sessions, and learning new, more positive ways to deal with peers.

Rick is well known for his love for working with kids and is well respected for his supervision of the behavioral health workers who provide the day-to-day care and skills building for children and adolescents at Midwest Center for Youth and Families. When asked what he does, he says, “Keep staff focused on the mission—to fight the war on mental illness.”

The BHWs at Midwest Center for Youth and Families function as coaches and role models for residents, to encourage more pro-social behaviors, such as being respectful, compliance with authority, positive social skills, positive self-esteem, conflict resolution and anger management skills. They focus on teaching kids how to recognize the impact of negative choices and what the impact of making more positive choices can have on their lives. (Continued on Page 3)

## Fighting the War against Mental Illness . . . One Day at a Time (Continued)

Rick is a strong team leader, modeling the skills required for a successful BHW. When visiting the facility, you're likely to find him singing to the kids in the morning to get them motivated for their day, or raising them up with positive affirmations, like "this too shall pass" and "whatever it takes to get thru the day—one step at time". He says it's important to be a kid yourself. And, in order to earn a kid's trust and respect, he says you have to treat them the way you'd like to be treated yourself.

"Sarge", as the kids and staff fondly call him, combines the experience from his military career—tough love—with his experience as a behavioral health worker to daily teach kids new ways of coping with their mental illness and new skills that will help them make better behavioral choices.

When asked what the most important part of his job is, Rick says, "You've got to love what you do-- and when parents leave their child in your care--you have to let them know *we'll be there for your child and take care of them for you while they're here.*"



### I'm Going to Give these DBT Skills a Chance to Change My Life!



Self-Soothing is a Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) skill practiced regularly by the residents at Midwest Center for Youth and Families and South Shore Academy. The focus of the skill is to teach the youth how to take a break from all the stress they deal with in therapy and focus on themselves. At South Shore Academy, the youth participate in a Self-Soothe Night four times a week. During that time, they engage in a variety of self-relaxing activities, like making smoothies, painting, crafts, dancing to music and movies. The activities are intended to assist youth in discovering how to relax themselves and self-soothe—a beneficial skill for us all to master!

One of our young ladies at South Shore Academy has this to say about her experience with Self-Soothe Night: "It all started when I was a young girl. I wasn't able to accept the things that were going on in my life. And, it carried over into my present life. I seem to think that everyone is against me. Everyone is trying to drag me down and ruin my life, like my dad did. So, a few days ago, I participated in a Self-Soothe Night. I sat down on a couch all alone in a room called the *Commons Area*. While messing with a Rubix cube, I was thinking, *why in the world was I even allowed to participate in this activity after being a complete butt today*. Then, it dawned on me--maybe they do care. Maybe, I'm not alone in this world. Maybe, they are trying to help. That led me to thinking about how I can change my behaviors. And, I think I know how. I heard somewhere that you decide how you feel. Yes--how you feel! And, I've decided I'm going to be more mindful and make better decisions. I am finally going to give these skills a chance to change my life--thanks to Self-Soothe Night!"

--Jenna, South Shore Academy Resident

**To make a referral or get more information, please feel free to contact us!**

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