



SMUHSD
Mental Health eNews/Email to Families
May 5, 2017

Our Views of Mental Health

We all have different views about mental health, and our opinions often change as we learn more about the topic or have a personal experience that brings this issue home. In general, however, we think about mental health in ways very different from physical health. But should we?

Just like our energy and physical vitality waxes and wanes, so it is with our mental health. And we are better guardians of our students when we recognize the signs of poor mental health and assist our students in getting the help they need.

Issues of the mind have historically been separate from education. Thankfully, we now recognize the important role schools can have in identifying students who need social-emotional health and providing a first line of support. In the past few years, the district has added considerable resources to this work.

This email describes some of our new initiatives. Even if your student has not had to access these resources, the chances are high that a close friend or classmate has.

I hope you learn from this newsletter and can attend our discussion on Monday, June 5th. Stay tuned for your invite with final details.

Sincerely,

Kevin Skelly, Ph.D.
Superintendent

A Year of Education and Outreach on Mental Health in Review

In October of 2016, we shared with our families that, according to the latest research, one in five students living in the U.S. demonstrates signs or symptoms of a mental health disorder: anxiety, depression, trauma, etc.

This school year, as part of the annual organizational goals, the Board adopted a goal that focused on examining, analyzing, and improving our student support systems to meet the changing social-emotional health needs of our students.

Thanks to a grant from the Peninsula Health Care District and our strong relationship with Stanford University, SMUHSD was able to create a new mental health model and substantially expand our services to support and promote the social emotional health of our students this year.

The additional resources allowed us to create a school-based mental health model which helps schools identify students in distress and connects them to appropriate services.

Each of our schools has two to three Wellness Counselors who provide counseling, consultation, professional development, parent support, and crisis intervention for all students. In addition, three Health and Wellness Coordinators serve two high schools each, providing an additional level of support.

Here are some highlights of our work this year:

- One-on-one counseling of students and their families
- Drop-in support for students who make the decision to reach out
- Numerous group counseling sessions to break the isolation of mental illness
- Classroom and staff presentations on stress/anxiety, depression, healthy relationships, the effects of trauma, etc.
- Parent education events on mental health
- Free and open-to-all events like “One Love”(<http://www.joinonelove.org/>) immigration rights, suicide prevention, eating disorders, bullying and LGBTQ+ issues
- Pilot programs on mental health, stigma reduction programs and peer mentoring
- Surveys to assess the mental health supports on campus
- Crisis interventions and mental health assessments

In addition to the above list, we also had a community conversation about a later start which research suggests could be helpful for many students. We saw the conversation around the topic of a later start to be a part of this overall emotional well-being work. Despite the fact that school start times will stay the same, the conversation hopefully had the positive effect of highlighting how important sleep is. Next year’s likely conversation about a homework policy, which is an outgrowth of the later start conversation, will continue this effort to support the health of our students.

SMUHSD Teenage Mental Health Awareness Forum

Join the SMUHSD, experts in the field of teenage mental health, community partners and fellow families for an in-depth and personal discussion of the epidemic of teenage mental illness.

Monday, June 5th

6:30-8pm

FREE

Light refreshments will be served.

Presented in English, Spanish and Chinese.

This forum will give families the opportunity to receive education from teen mental health leaders like Stanford and Star Vista, connect with families who endure your struggles, and learn that help is there for you. Don’t miss this opportunity to learn information that will ultimately help your student through difficult times.

Questions?

Contact Sheri Costa, Communications Manager, at scosta@smuhsd.org or 650.558.2202.

Resources When You Need Help – It Takes an Entire Community

The end of the semester and individual life challenges combined with the inevitable ups and downs of teenage years can mean some students need extra support. If you are concerned about the emotional well-being of your student for any reason, please do not hesitate to call your school counselor. The following information on school counseling services is currently posted on our home page. We thought it was worth reprinting here so you were sure not to miss it.

- [Aragon](#)
- [Burlingame](#)
- [Capuchino](#)
- [Hillsdale](#)
- [Mills](#)
- [Peninsula Alternative](#)
- [San Mateo](#)

Below we provide you a select list of community organizations that offer education, support and treatment services.

Helpful Numbers

- 24-hour Suicide and Crisis Line (Santa Clara County) 650.494.8420 or 408.279.3312
- Children's and Adolescent Hotline: 650.5675437
- Uplift (EMQ) Crisis Team (Santa Clara County) 408.379.9085 or 877.412.7474
- Star Vista Crisis Line (San Mateo County): 650.579.0350
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Santa Clara Warm Line: 408.435.0400, option 1
- NAMI San Mateo Warm Line: 650.638.0800
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255) Suicide prevention telephone hotline funded by the U.S. government. Provides free, 24-hour assistance.
- Rape Crisis Hot Line (24 hour): 650.493.7273

MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

HEARD Alliance

HEARD Alliance is a collaborative effort among healthcare agencies, schools and providers in the SF Bay Area. It shares useful resources and websites on mental health. Located on the Peninsula in the SF Bay Area, the HEARD Alliance is a community alliance of health care professionals, including primary care and mental health providers. They work in various settings, including clinics, hospitals, private practices, schools, government and private organizations. Crisis Hotline: 1.800.273.TALK. For more information, please visit www.heardalliance.org

StarVista

This organization delivers high impact services through counseling, skill development and crisis prevention to children, youth, adults and families. They offer safe, supportive, non-judgmental environments and several programs offer more intensive treatment for clients who are dealing with trauma or multiple mental health and substance abuse issues. For more information please call 650.591.9623 or visit www.star-vista.org

NAMI (Nat'l Alliance on Mental Illness)

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. For more information, visit www.nami.org.

One Life Counseling Center (San Carlos)

Provide affordable individual, group and family counseling accessible for all age groups. 650.394.5155. For more information, visit <http://onelifecounselingcenter.com/>

Kara (Palo Alto) *Grief Specific

Offers emotional support and info to adults, teens and children who are grieving a death. 650.321.5272. For more information, visit <https://kara-grief.org/>

Parents Place

Offers parenting workshops, parent coaching and consultation, child behavior and school support, clinical and special needs services, parent/child activity groups, child and family therapy, and other helpful things for parents. Located in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. For more information, please call 650.688.3040 or visit <http://parentsplaceonline.org/>

Uplift Family Services

A statewide nonprofit that helps families and children. The agency is one of the largest, most comprehensive mental health treatment programs in California and take a state-of-the-art approach to children and adolescents with complex behavioral health challenges. Located in several counties. For more information (based in San Mateo County), please call 408-379-3790 or visit www.upliftfs.org/about/locations/san-mateo-county/

Stanford Children's Health – Teen Van

Provides health services for uninsured and/or homeless youth by visiting various San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara County locations. For more information please call 650.736.7172 or visit <http://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/service/teen-van/>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

AFSP is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. Established in 1987, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is a voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a nationwide community empowered by research, education and advocacy to take action against this leading cause of death. For more information, visit <http://www.afsp.org/>

Bay Area Centers for Adolescents

Center for treating depression, anxiety, substance abuse, defiance, problems with family, cutting, eating disorders, sexual identity issues, ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities, anger through individual/family therapy, medical management, psychological assessment, and educational therapy. Multiple locations: San Francisco, Marin, Oakland/Berkeley, and Palo Alto. For more information, please call 415.448.6679 or visit <http://bayareaadolescent.com/home.html>

County of San Mateo – PRIDE Initiative

Committed to foster a welcoming environment for the LGBTQ12s communities living and working in San Mateo County through an interdisciplinary and inclusive approach. The PRIDE Initiative collaborates

with the newly formed San Mateo County LGBTQ Commission. For more information, please visit www.smchealth.org/pride-initiative

County of San Mateo – Sequoia Teen Wellness Center

This clinic is the only provider of healthcare services exclusively for youth (ages 12-21) in Southern San Mateo County and cover a multitude of health needs. For more information, please call 650.366.2927 or visit www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/sequoiaTWC/

Fred Finch Youth Center

They work with young people to overcome multiple and simultaneous challenges, including homelessness, economic disadvantage, mental health and cognitive disabilities, and histories of significant trauma and loss. Youth Center locations in Alameda County and San Mateo County. For more information (San Mateo County) please call 650.286.2090, ext. 237 or visit www.fredfinch.org

ONLINE RESOURCES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

- [Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)
- NAMI's booklet entitled "[What Families Should Know About Adolescent Depression and Treatment Options](#)"
- The [parent page](#) for The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide
- [National Bullying Information](#)
- [Bullying and Cyberbullying Resources for Schools, Youth and Families](#)

NetFlix Series: 13 Reasons Why – A Harmful and Dangerous Depiction of Teen Suicide

13 Reasons was released at 12:01 AM on Friday, March 31st, as students began spring break. It is a series based on Jay Asher's 2007 book entitled "Thirteen Reasons Why." The plot details events leading up to the lead character's death by suicide, with episodes based on a purported "reason" for this tragic end. The book paints a more nuanced portrait of the events in its narration than the graphic nature of the series.

District leaders, in consultation with leading experts in student mental health, have been struggling with how to respond to this series. Many experts believe 13 Reasons glorifies suicide and presents taking one's life as a justifiable solution to setbacks and cruelty. It doesn't feel like a stretch to say that, beyond glorifying death by suicide, the series presents taking one's life as a justifiable solution to life's challenges.

Like many surrounding districts, we have not sent anything to parents about the film, in part because we did not want to add further publicity to the film. More importantly, broadly sharing news of this flawed NetFlix series might lead to more of our students watching the film and, for emotionally vulnerable ones, increased suicidal ideation. Even the producers of the series seem now to recognize that the film could cause this – they have expanded the warnings that accompany the film.

I have not watched the series as I don't want to support its dangerous premise in any way. However, if you do decide to watch it, or you learn that your student has, the experts at Stanford have prepared some thoughts on how to discuss this topic with your student.

Possible questions to ask your student:

- If you could talk to any of the characters, who would you want to talk to? What would you want to say to him/her?
- What are three situations from the series when young people acted in heroic and empathic ways?
- If you were the main character, what words or actions might have helped you survive?
- If you were the main character, what might have helped you make different decisions?
- If you could rewrite history -- or even just one event in each one of the 13 installments, what would you rewrite? In the first? In the second? In the third? Why is that event so important?

Most importantly, tell your student that suicide is not a solution. It does not matter how many “reasons” or ways others have hurt them; for every person that has hurt them, there are many more that will see them worthy of a wonderful, long, virtuous life.

Closing Thoughts – Mental Health, Redemption and Unexpected Gifts

During high school one of the people closest to me suffered severe mental health issues. She was hospitalized for several months and struggled to complete high school. For the next five years or so, her health issues waxed and waned, with particular challenges during times of transition and stress. It was excruciating for her family. While there was a history of mental health issues, it was accompanied by considerable shame and a sense of powerlessness – there just didn’t seem to be as much that could be done as one would hope.

Like many stories of mental health challenges, this one has a most happy ending. This person made a full recovery and has been symptom free for decades. She is happily married, the parent of two beautiful children, and a wonderful contributor to her community.

One of her greatest contributions to the world is her work as a social worker at the Veterans Administration. She is remarkably empathetic, with an uncanny knack for finding just the right resources for those she serves. People seek her out for advice and her dogged commitment to serving those who served our country through military service. She seems to know what people need before they do.

One of the most powerful things I have read about mental health is by Scott Stossel. He describes in vivid detail his struggles with anxiety in the Atlantic Magazine January, 2014 edition. He closes with the following:

“...My anxiety can be intolerable. But it is also, maybe, a gift—or at least the other side of a coin I ought to think twice about before trading in. As often as anxiety has held me back—prevented me from traveling, or from seizing opportunities or taking certain risks—it has also unquestionably spurred me forward...

I do know that some of the things for which I am most thankful—the opportunity to help lead a respected magazine; a place, however peripheral, in shaping public debate; a peripatetic and curious sensibility; and whatever quotients of emotional intelligence and good judgment I possess—not only coexist with my condition but are in some meaningful way the product of it.

In his 1941 essay 'The Wound and the Bow,' the literary critic Edmund Wilson writes of the Sophoclean hero Philoctetes, whose suppurating, never-healing snakebite wound on his foot is linked to a gift for unerring accuracy with his bow and arrow—his 'malodorous disease' is inseparable from his 'superhuman art' for marksmanship. I have always been drawn to this parable: in it lies, as the writer Jeanette Winterson has put it, 'the nearness of the wound to the gift,' the insight that in weakness and shamefulness is also the potential for transcendence, heroism, or redemption.

My anxiety remains an unhealed wound that, at times, holds me back and fills me with shame—but it may also be, at the same time, a source of strength and a bestower of certain blessings."

Be well...

Sincerely,

Kevin Skelly, Ph.D.
Superintendent