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## **Shining a light on teens' mental health**

Knowledge, resources can remove stigma from mental health discussion

By David F. Larson, Ed.D.

Superintendent, Glenbard Township High School District 87

The physical, emotional, hormonal and social changes of adolescence can make for challenges that may seem overwhelming to both teens and their parents/guardians. As educators, our No. 1 concern is our students' safety and well-being. May is Mental Health Month, which grants us an important opportunity to shed light on how mental health affects young people.

Let's look at two major mental health concerns that adolescents are facing:

- **Depression/Suicidality**
  - Approximately 20% of adolescents nationwide are suffering from depression, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
  - In the next 24 hours, 1,439 adolescents will attempt suicide.
  
- **Anxiety/Stress**
  - Approximately 32% of adolescents are managing a diagnosed anxiety disorder, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

These conditions can have significant negative impact on a teen's ability to have healthy relationships with friends and family and successfully problem solve, as well as their overall academic performance.

One of the most effective methods of raising mentally healthy children and adolescents is to foster social and emotional skills that will help them tolerate the unpredictable stressors in life. According to the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), it's critical that we teach children how to develop:

- Self-awareness – accurately identifying their personal strengths, areas that need further development, and how their actions impact others
- Social awareness – being respectful of diversity, promoting social justice and equity
- Self-management skills - that foster resilience, assertiveness and self-efficacy.
- Responsible decision-making skills – being an active listener, being reciprocal in positive regard and demonstrating empathy

- Relationship skills: Communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

It's critical for schools to partner with parents and guardians in teaching and modeling healthy coping strategies and habits. The following are ways parents and guardians can help.

Parents can model the above skills for their children by talking with them about the events of the day, how they felt about those events and encourage resilience in the face of challenges. Parents who spend quality time with their children engage in a range of activities from board games to nature hikes, to volunteering with a local agency, sitting down at the table for dinner, and creating new hobbies and traditions, establishing lasting, positive connections.

Attend the many Glenbard Parent Series: GPS Navigating Healthy Families offerings. GPS provides high caliber programming for caregivers, students, educators and community members from all suburbs to increase awareness and understanding of healthy behavioral development to help young people make their way through adolescence and become resilient adults. Visit [glenbardgps.org](http://glenbardgps.org) for resources and more information. Also, check out Glenbard District 87's resources page at <https://www.glenbard87.org/other-online-resources-incomplete/>

Parents/caregivers should encourage their students to access their school counselor, school social worker or school psychologist about stress, anxiety or feeling depressed. Student Services staff within the school system can refer students and their families to resources in the community, as well as links to additional resources. A wealth of resources is available through DuPage County's Community Resources Information System at <http://dupagecris.org/>. Also, learn about free or low-cost opportunities through NAMI DuPage at <http://namidupage.org/>. NAMI awareness events are listed at <https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events>.

Together, we can help our teens lead healthy lives.