

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN THE CLASSROOM: EXPLORING INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STIGMA

Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier

Sarah Hart

Charity Visser

St. Francis Xavier University

INTRODUCTIONS

- ▶ **Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier, BA, BEd, MAdEd, PhD (ABD)**
 - ▶ St. Francis Xavier University, Faculty of Education
- ▶ **Sarah Hart, BA, BEd**
 - ▶ St. Francis Xavier University, Faculty of Education
- ▶ **Charity Visser, BMus, BEd**
 - ▶ St. Francis Xavier University, Faculty of Education



ON THE STICKY NOTE:

Write the first thing
that comes to mind
when you think of
mental illness or a
student with mental
illness

DEFINING TERMS: STIGMA



Stigma is a mark of disgrace or discredit that sets a person apart from others. It involves negative stereotypes and prejudice. Stigma results from fear and mistrust of differences.

It builds on repeated exposure to misinformation, reinforcing negative perceptions and false beliefs that are intensely held and enduring. Stigma leads to social exclusion and discrimination.

Discrimination, which is unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice, affects people in many areas including employment, housing, health care, policy and funding neglect, coercive treatment and denial of basic human rights.”

Mental Health Commission of Canada

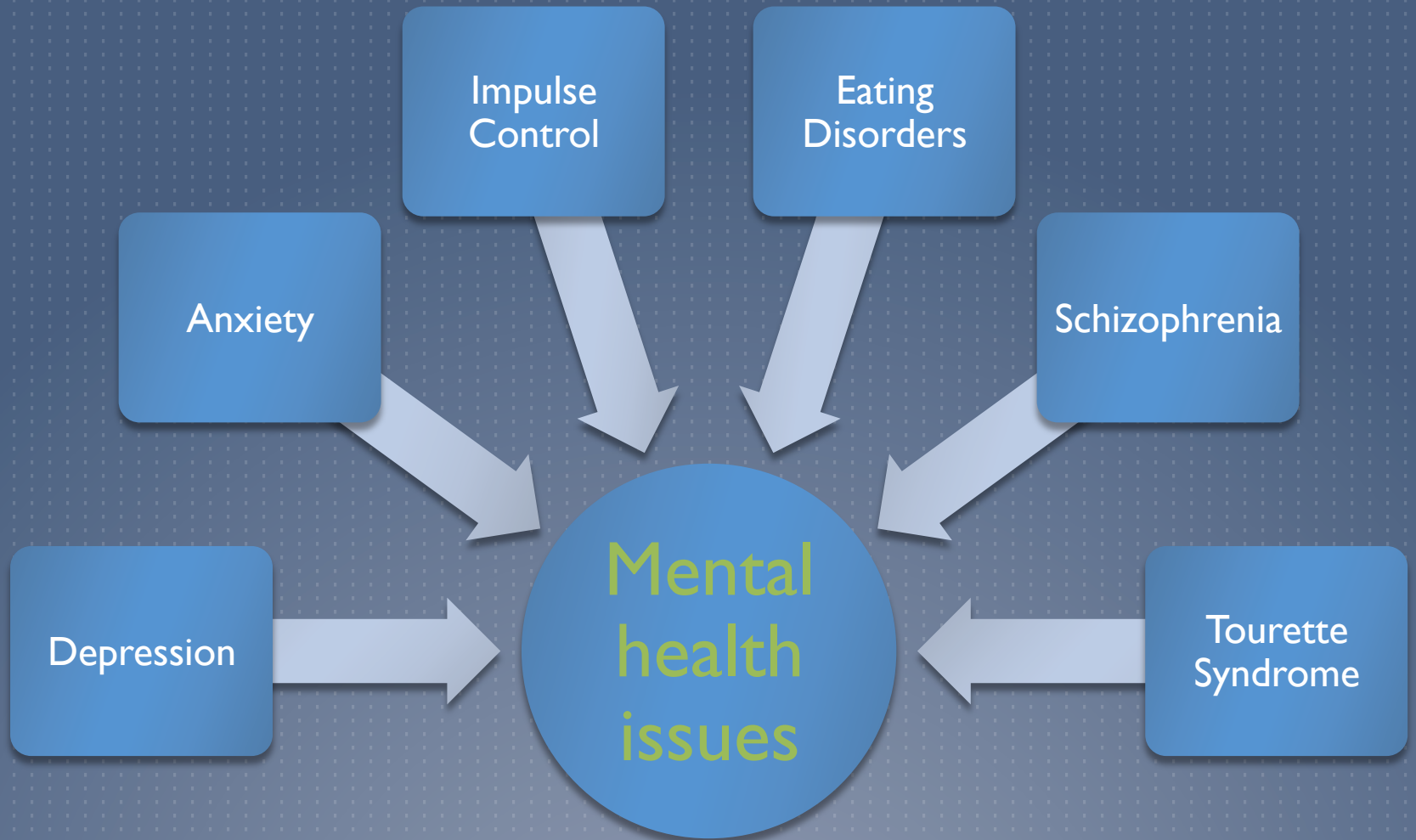
MISCONCEPTIONS

- ▶ People with mental illness are all potentially violent and dangerous.
- ▶ People with mental illness are somehow responsible for their condition.
- ▶ People with mental illness have nothing positive to contribute.

These misconceptions are rooted in stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination.

SESSION OUTLINE

- ▶ Setting the context: Prevalence of mental health issues
- ▶ Roles of educators
- ▶ Creating an inclusive classroom
 - ▶ Developing students' capacities for appropriate behaviour, social competency, academic achievement, and emotional well-being
 - ▶ Exploring inclusionary strategies for teachers to use in the creation of safe classroom environments



PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- ▶ In a typical classroom of 30 students, 17% to 20% of students may experience mental health issues.
- ▶ 3 to 4 of them will have issues that interfere with day-to-day living.
- ▶ **Less than 15% of these students will receive assistance because of the associated stigma and misunderstanding.**

(Buchanan, Colton, & Chamberlain, 2010, p.A1)

HIGH SCHOOL

- ▶ According to Statistics Canada, teenagers and young adults aged 15-24 experience the highest incidence of mental disorders of any age group in Canada.



THE ROLE OF EDUCATORS

“Teachers’ roles and relationships reach through and beyond the substance of the curriculum to impact students’ feelings of self-worth, dignity, identity, and belonging.”

Teachers are not diagnosticians or doctors, nor should they be expected to be. But they are expert observers, and can recognize early warning signs of adolescent mental illness if they know what they are.



COMMON SIGNS OF MENTAL ILLNESS

In general

- ▶ marked changes in personality;
- ▶ confused thinking;
- ▶ inability to cope with problems and daily activities;
- ▶ strange ideas or delusions;
- ▶ excessive fears, worries or anxiety;
- ▶ prolonged feelings of irritability or sadness;
- ▶ significant changes in eating or sleeping patterns;
- ▶ thinking or talking about suicide;
- ▶ extreme highs and lows in mood;
- ▶ abuse of alcohol or drugs;
- ▶ excessive anger, hostility;
- ▶ paranoid behaviour;
- ▶ social withdrawal;
- ▶ irrational fears.

In school

- ▶ consistent late arrivals or frequent absences;
- ▶ low morale;
- ▶ disorganization in completing school work or in study habits;
- ▶ lack of cooperation or a general inability to communicate with others;
- ▶ increased accidents;
- ▶ frequent complaints or evidence of fatigue or unexplained pains;
- ▶ problems concentrating, making decisions, or remembering things;
- ▶ missed deadlines, delays in completing assignments, poor exam grades;
- ▶ making excuses for missed deadlines, or poor quality work;
- ▶ decreased interest or involvement in class topics or academics in general.

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CAPACITIES

- ▶ In order to support and respond effectively to the needs of a student with mental health problems or mental illness, it is not necessary for teachers or counsellors to have in-depth knowledge of that student's diagnosis (if they have been given one).
- ▶ What matters more is being able to provide effective support and academic accommodations by:
 - ▶ assessing the learning needs of their students, and
 - ▶ developing an understanding of the student's experience
- ▶ Studies have shown that a combination of education and face-to-face interaction has a greater impact on changing attitudes than using either strategy in isolation.

Awareness is key



BUILDING CAPACITY

- ▶ Take time to build relationships with individual students.
- ▶ Understand and accept who each student is as an individual.
- ▶ Find ways to make students confident beyond their obstacles.
- ▶ Empower students.



CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGIES

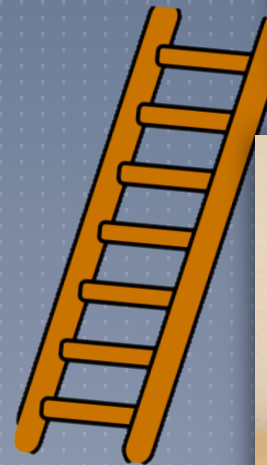
- ▶ Fidget toys
- ▶ Self monitoring, self control
- ▶ Journalling
- ▶ Break cards
- ▶ Safe zones
- ▶ Ladder of Happiness
- ▶ Junk Thoughts Jar



How was my day?

- Green = A great day!
- Yellow = With a few reminders, my day was good.
- Red = I was not cooperative and caused disruptions

Comments:



“My daughter’s teacher created a positive journal for her, so when something in school was bothering her she can get out her journal, write that negative thing down, and beside it she writes 6 things that happened that day that were positive so she can see visually there is much more to be positive about than to worry about the negative. It has really helped calm her down when she begins to worry.”

Parent of an 11-year old girl

TEACHING STRATEGIES

- ▶ Make time for social time: knee to knee, elbow to elbow
- ▶ Community Circle
- ▶ Start your Day! End your Day!
- ▶ VIP of the Day
- ▶ Teacher First Aid Kit
- ▶ Organization, organization, organization

CURRICULAR STRATEGIES



- ▶ Texts such as the “Iris the Dragon” series
- ▶ Embedded: Art, Literature, Health, Physical Education, Social Studies,
 - ▶ Why people acted the way they did, how has it changed, *why* has it changed

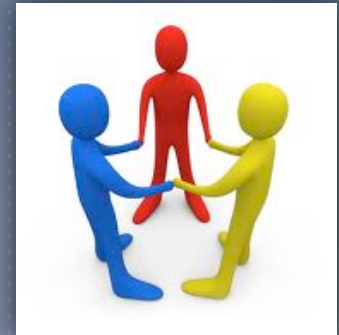
Caution: Different ethnic and cultural groups may have differing perceptions / attitudes towards mental illness

EXPLORING INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES

- ▶ Classroom norms
- ▶ Talk about it
- ▶ Proactive approaches vs. reactive clean-up
- ▶ Structure and routine
 - ▶ Today's things to do, time signals
 - ▶ Monthly wall calendar with assignments
- ▶ Humour Therapy
- ▶ Mediation
- ▶ Positive Effective Behaviour Strategies (PEBS)
- ▶ Virtues

AT THE END OF THE DAY ...

- ▶ Effective communication is the key to building relationships of mutual trust and cooperation.
 - ▶ Administrators, support workers, teachers, and students may need help to strengthen their communication skills and knowledge base when dealing with mental health issues.
 - ▶ Non-confrontational
- ▶ Self-reflection, self-care (how did *you* react in the situation)
- ▶ Don't take it personally
- ▶ RHB



MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

MAY 7–13, 2012

Selected Resources

ABCs of Mental Health: <http://www.hincksdellcrest.org/ABC/Welcome>

Canadian Mental Health Association: www.cmha.ca

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: www.camh.net

IWK Mental Health and Addictions Program: www.iwk.nshealth.ca/

Mental Health Commission of Canada: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca>

Mental Health and High School: <http://www.cmha.ca/highschool/>

Mind your Mind: www.mindyourmind.ca

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports: <http://www.pbis.org/school/default.aspx>

Teen Mental Health: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/about-us/>

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