



Mental health promotion and executive function skills to improve occupational performance in the academic setting and beyond

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About this Presentation

This presentation will outline ideas and interventions to support executive function skills and mental health promotion to improve occupational engagement using multi-tiered systems of support.

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will:

- Describe the important difference between mental health and mental illness
- Recognize the foundational need for positive mental health on executive functioning and occupational performance
- Identify strategies to use, based on MTSS, in the school-based setting to address mental health promotion, executive functioning, and occupational performance
- Summarize effective approaches, ideas, and advocacy measures to move mental health promotion into the everyday activities within the school-setting

To Begin

"We cannot change what we are not aware of, and once we are aware, we cannot help but change."

- Sheryl Sandberg

Mental Illness and Mental Health

Mental Illness (American Psychiatric Association, 2022)

- Health Conditions involving emotions, thinking, behaviors or a combination
- Associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work, school, or family activities
- Diagnosable mental disorders which involve the above

Mental Health (CDC, 2018; WHO, 2018)

- Integral to overall health
- More than absence of mental illness, mental disorders, or mental disabilities (CDC, 2018a; WHO, 2018)
- Fundamental for interacting with others, earn a living, participate in and enjoy life, and is essential across the lifespan (CDC, 2018b; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020; WHO, 2018).
- Foundation for emotions, thinking, communication, learning, resilience, hope, and self-esteem

Mental Health

Mental health is the foundation for:

- Emotions
- Thinking
- Communication
- Learning
- Resilience
- Hope
- Self-esteem.

Mental Health is key in:

- Relationships
- Personal Well-being
- Emotional Well-Being
- Contributing to community and/or society
- Coping with Adversity

Well-Being

- Holistic term integrating the mind and the body (CDC, 2018b)
- Associated with self-perceived health, longevity, and factors into both physical and social environments (CDC, 2018b)
- Impacts job, family, and related economic benefits (CDC, 2018b)
- Ultimate goal of health promotion (AOTA, 2020)
- Subjective well-being is associated with greater school satisfaction, academic self-perceptions, academic achievement, higher quality social relationships, and better physical health, as well as predictor of future success in students (Roth et al., 2017)
- Mentally healthy youth - more ready to learn, actively engage in school and activities, have supportive connections, and add to school culture (Youth.gov, n.b.a.)

Positive Mental Health

Positive Mental Health involves

(CDC, 2018a; CDC, 2018b; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020; WHO, 2018)

- Positive Emotions
- Positive Affect
- Interest in life
- Actively participating in Daily Life Activities
- Happiness
- Positive Psychological Functioning (sense of belonging, sense of self, positive attitude towards others, and meaningful social outlets and relationships)

Occupational Engagement

- Linked to overall well-being
- Active participation in occupations
- Including academics, extracurriculars, lunch/recess, social interactions, play/leisure, belonging, and other subjective areas of participation, including hobbies and interests
- Meaningful, valuable, and purposeful to the individual

Occupations are "personalized everyday activities that people do as individuals, in families, and with communities to occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to life." (WFOT, 2012, para. 2).

Take a Step Back and Reflect

“It is neither wealth nor splendor; but tranquility and occupation which give you happiness.”

- Thomas Jefferson, Personal letter to his sister

Mental Health and Executive Function Skills

How does our Mental Health impact our Executive Functioning?

Proactive versus Reactive Responses?

Executive functions are cognitive processes carried out by the prefrontal area of the frontal lobe and include planning, working memory, inhibition, self-monitoring, attention, initiation, and self-regulation (Goldstein and Naglieri, 2014).

WSCC Model (CDC, 2021) Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model

- The child is the focal point, with the green encircling them (healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged)
- The white emphasizes collaborating policy, process and practice to improve learning and improve health
- The blue is the 10 key components to support health and learning to assist each child, each school, and each community
- The yellow is the community, emphasizing the school community, and how the community requires input, resources, and collaboration to fully support each child

Adapted from ESSA Advocacy meeting, 11-16-2021 PowerPoint presentation:

Image: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm>



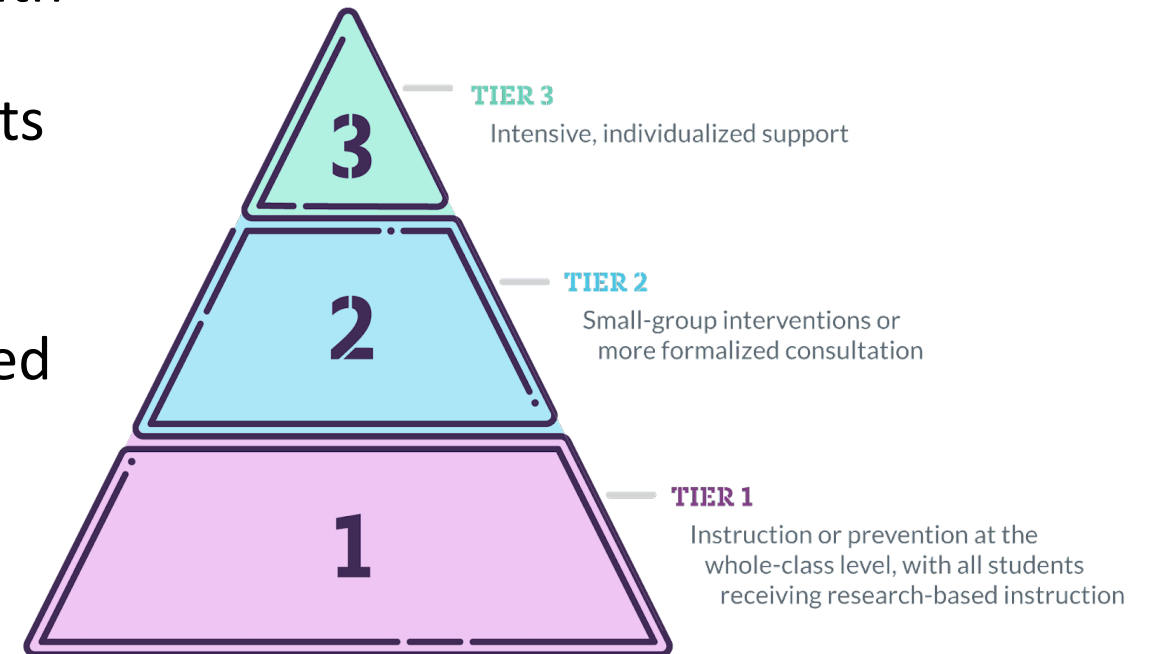
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Current standard for implementing mental health services in schools (Cahill & Egan, 2017)
Framework to improve outcomes for all students using EBP (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2021)

Tier 3 - Identified needs, Intensive, individualized interventions.

Tier 2 - Individuals at risk

Tier 1 - Whole-Class



Public Health Model and Mental Health Promotion

- Initiatives aim to (WHO, 2020):
 - Emotional Regulation
 - Enhance Alternatives to Risk-Taking Behaviors
 - Build Resilience
 - Promote Supportive Social Environments and networks
- Shift of focus from reactive to proactive
- Emphasis on improving students; social, physical, and economic environments (Bazyk, 2011)
- Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential to meet all students' needs (Bazyk, 2011)
- Minnesota Department of Health has a webpage devoted to Health Promotion

The Importance of Environment

- Environments influence and shape the well-being and development of the children and youth who grow up in them (WHO, 2020).
- Schools are ideal place to enhance interactions (Garcia-Carrion et al., 2018; Kumar & Mohideen, 2019).
- When interventions are Universal, all students can be reached (AOTA, n.d.; Cahill et al., 2020; Feiss et al., 2019; Walter et al., 2018)
- Supportive and safe environments with positive mental health and well-being programs, can (Leschied et al., 2018)
- Increase classroom participation
- Facilitate and help develop trusting relationships for students and staff

Equity, Access, and Who is Responsible?

- Teachers and staff do not feel well equipped (National Academics of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021; O'Reilly et al., 2018)
- Mental health needs should be a focus of education through interdisciplinary approaches, and a part of a whole school, multi-tiered approach, including all school personnel (Suldo et al., 2014; O'Reilly et al., 2018)
- Teachers need to believe in programming and feel confident (Leschied et al., 2018)
- Not a lot of evidence based, concrete ways to address and with limited resources, priority is not always given (Atkins et al., 2010)
- Identifying support personnel and resources (Atkins et al., 2010; Bazyk et al., 2015)
- School mental health teams should work together to benefit students through initiatives to meet the needs of all students (Bazyk et al., 2018; Suldo et al., 2014)

Academic Success

- Mental health impacts academic outcomes; Academic achievement impacts student mental health and well-being (Suldo et al., 2014)
- Impact of school climate on success (Suldo et al., 2014)
- *Now is the Time* (youth.gov, n.d.)
 - Initiatives to improve mental health access and equip schools
 - EBP to address school climate, early intervention, promotion of mental health and well-being, and staff development and coaching
- Interaction-based mental health programming in schools show correlate with academic achievement long-term, which may lead to other long-term positive effects (Garcia-Carrion et al., 2019)

Intervention Ideas

- Positive Psychology
- Mental Health Literacy
- Character Strengths
- Daily Check-ins
- Individualized Planner Systems
- Occupational Exploration
- Every Moment Counts Resources



Positive Psychology Interventions (PPI)

Positive psychology is defined as:

"a field of psychological theory and research that focuses on the psychological states (e.g., contentment, joy), individual traits or character strengths (e.g., intimacy, integrity, altruism, wisdom), and social institutions that enhance subjective well-being and make life most worth living" (American Psychological Association, 2020. Para. 1).

Positive Psychology Interventions (PPI) affect (Bazyk et al., 2020; Cilar et al., 2020):

- Happiness
- Well-Being
- Flourishing
- Emotional Regulation
- Reducing Mental Health Symptoms
- Participation in Occupations
- Attitude towards others

Mental Health Literacy

Mental Health Impacts (CDC, 2020):

- How we think, feel, and act
- Our emotional, psychological, and social well-being
- How we relate to others
- Make health choices

Mental Health Literacy Ideas:

- Reducing Stigma (Bazyk, 2011)
- Incorporating conversations
- Literature addressing Mental Health, Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and more
- Writing about feelings, emotions, mental health and well-being
- Social Emotional Learning programs
- Incorporating ideas into daily and weekly routines (Cahill & Beisbeir, 2020)

Character Strengths

Research links character strength education to:

- Well-Being
- Flourishing
- Increased life satisfaction and happiness
- Decreased psychopathology
- Improved self-esteem
- Positive affect changes
- Academic achievement
- Flourish in times of adversity
- Less withdrawal to challenge
- Increased optimism
- Decreased behavioral problems
- Class cohesion

(Oppenheimer et al., 2014; Proctor et al., 2011; Quinlan et al., 2015)

What is it?

- A way to promote positive behavior and effective learning (Proctor et al., 2011)
- Focus on abilities, identifying and building upon them, versus focusing on deficits, limitations, and disabilities (AOTA, n.d.)
- Promote individual differences, making it more personal and encouraging (Lavy, 2020)

Research on Character Strengths

- Oppenheimer et al. (2014): Impact well-being through lessons
- Froh et al. (2008): Gratitude Interventions had both immediate and long-term effects
- Proctor et al., (2011): Higher life satisfaction, increased positive affect, and self-esteem
- Jin & Wang (2019): Gratitude is significantly positively correlated with learning
- Lavy (2020): Interventions showed positive correlations

"Perhaps, identifying character strengths is where we can start. Everyone has strengths. They need to be recognized, celebrated, strengthened, and used" (Park and Peterson, 2008, p. 91)

Strengths Based Interventions

- School personnel help develop children from academic, personal, social, and emotional perspectives
- Strengths-based approaches can strengthen students' occupational performance, social participation, activities of daily living (ADLs), education, work, play/leisure, and sleep/rest (AOTA, n.d.).
- *Thanks! A strengths-based gratitude curriculum for tweens and teens.* (GGSC, n.d.)
- VIA Institute on Character

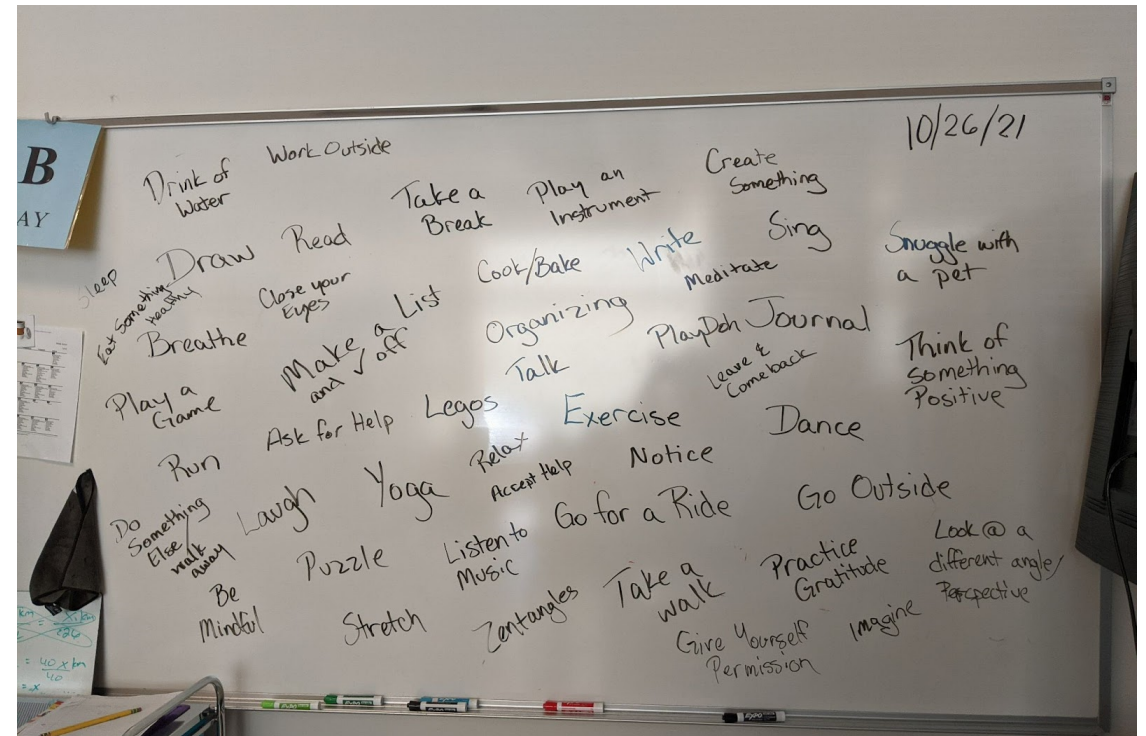
Daily Check-Ins

- Positive Post-It Notes
- All About Me Activity
- Index Card Notes
- Gratitude Practices
- Planner activities



Occupational Exploration

- Make time for exploration of what brings joy and happiness
- Focus on strengths
- Activities that are meaningful
- Activity Based Interventions
- The importance of practicing what we preach



Every Moment Counts

- Embedded Strategies
- Calm Moments Cards
- Comfortable Cafeteria
- Refreshing Recess
- Making Leisure Matter

(<https://everymomentcounts.org/>)



More Ideas and Resources

[Big Life Journal](https://biglifejournal.com/) (https://biglifejournal.com/)

[GoZen](https://gozen.com/) (https://gozen.com/)

Calming and Coping Strategies

Goal Writing

[Action for Happiness](https://actionforhappiness.org/) (https://actionforhappiness.org/)

In Closing

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

- Barack Obama

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Thank you!

With sincere gratitude for each and every one of you and what you bring to the world!

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