

MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS IN A CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Julia Miller, School Psychologist, Psy.D
Alliant International University
California Southern University

INTRODUCTION & AIM

The purpose of this research project was to determine what research-based interventions would be beneficial in a general education environment to assist with mid-level or tier-2 mental health supports for students demonstrating need. Specifically, the focus was on what research has suggested that may support the typical elementary to middle grade general education teacher who has students experiencing such mental health needs as, anxiety, depression and possible self-harm within the classroom setting.

Concerning the statistics of suicide among children between the ages of 5 years and 12 years, the following information has been found: In the year 2020, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death for children between the ages of 5 years and 9 years in the United States (CDC, 2021). Additionally, in 2020, suicide was the second leading cause of death for children from 10 years to 14 years in the United States (CDC, 2021).

Research Question 1: What classroom-based interventions can be implemented for students experiencing such mental health needs as, anxiety, depression and possible self-harm?

Research Question 2: What effective research-based interventions can be implemented with fidelity by a typical general education teacher?

Research Question 3: How can elementary and middle school programs create trauma-supportive classrooms to assist unidentified students who may have underlining mental health needs such as, anxiety, depression and possible self-harm?

METHOD

Data Collection

The data collection process involved a multiple steps process of gathering information. A search of literary works was conducted using keywords pertinent to the study, resulting in the collection of numerous research papers. Specialized computer software for academic research was utilized to draw out the necessary data. Resources such as Proquest, EBSCOhost, Salem Press Reference, and PsychiatryOnline were employed throughout this procedure. The central focus of data extraction included the investigation and assessment of social-emotional interventions within generalized educational environments. Subsequently, research papers that satisfied the initial inclusion criteria outlined in the following section were collected from digital databases. Upon assembling a preliminary list of literature, each abstract was assessed to determine if it aligned with the detailed inclusion/exclusion criteria. In the end, all sources were carefully scrutinized and labeled as either suitable or unsuitable for the final extraction of data. An efficient search approach is vital for systematically uncovering articles while conducting a literature review. Identifying appropriate keywords for finding and acquiring relevant articles is crucial, as is establishing precise inclusion parameters throughout the search process (Breslin & Gatrell, 2020). Keywords employed in this literature review encompass school-oriented mental health interventions, class-based social-emotional interventions, and tiered evidence-based mental health interventions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis stage included constructing tables to outline the evidence, evaluating crucial aspects of interventions and assessments, appraising the thoroughness and quality of the intervention, and identifying additional necessary data and information (Romero et al., 2020). Through this process, each research-based intervention was examined for the consistency of the measure, how those conducting the study were able to control the internal validity of their research, and the external validity of the interventions reported on. The flaws and limitations of each study were closely looked at to ensure the integrity of each study (Tennant & Ross-Hellauer, 2020). This comprehensive instrumentation method has been applied to examine evidence-supported socio-emotional interventions within a standard educational context. Systematic Literature Review (SLR) data analysis techniques was utilized to classify and arrange the information into themes during both the data collection and analysis stage.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Classroom Interventions for Anxiety

The classroom teacher should implement straightforward strategies, such as establishing consistent routines, outlining clear expectations, and maintaining a well-organized classroom environment, to support students who experience anxiety (Jiménez-Mijangos et al., 2022). Minimizing excessive visual distractions is also crucial, as it ensures that each item in the classroom serves a specific purpose. All student materials should be easily accessible, clearly labeled, and systematically organized to decrease confusion and facilitate listening to and following directions. This level of organization improves workflow and promotes student independence (O'Hara et al., 2022). There should also be time given to students to tidy their desks and supplies, as struggling to locate items can increase student stress.

The layout of the classroom can also influence students' social-emotional well-being. Areas that are hard to navigate or create obstacles may contribute to behavioral issues and heightened stress for both students and teachers (Jiménez-Mijangos et al., 2022). Teachers should strive to identify areas where students frequently feel trapped or find it hard to ask for help, ensuring there are no locations where students are out of view. It is also vital to set fair and consistent expectations for all students to foster a sense of security. Uncertainty about what will happen next or how others might react can heighten anxiety (O'Hara et al., 2022). By providing clear expectations, students understand what is required of them, leading to a more positive classroom atmosphere.

Classroom Interventions for Self-injurious Behaviors

In daily discussions, it is important to communicate through classroom moments that feeling anxious in certain situations is entirely normal (K. R. Fox et al., 2020). Throughout the day, educators can find opportunities to explain that everyone has their own worries and there are effective strategies to cope with them when the worries become overwhelming. Educators can model a positive attitude for students, demonstrating how to maintain an optimistic outlook and navigate challenging situations (Calvo et al., 2022). This method is particularly beneficial for students returning after being away from school. When students miss classes, they may feel overwhelmed by the material they need to catch up on and disconnected from their peers (K. R. Fox et al., 2020). It can be helpful for classroom teachers to take the time to sit down with the students and develop a plan to help them catch up over the upcoming week.

Sensory input has also been reported to assist with decreasing self-injurious behaviors. One effective approach is to enhance the diversity and amount of sensory experiences available to children and adults as much as possible (Calvo et al., 2022). One of the methods for enhancing diversity is regularly changing sensory activities (K. R. Fox et al., 2020). By frequently rotating these activities, children remain engaged, decreasing the chances of boredom that might lead them to seek stimulation through self-harm. Second, it is important to provide a broad range of sensory activities (Calvo et al., 2022). Rather than offering toys or activities that provide similar sensory input, presenting a varied selection that activates different senses is more advantageous. Lastly, increasing the overall level of accessible activities for the child is another effective tactic (K. R. Fox et al., 2020). This process involves consistently maintaining a high level of stimulation, which can help reduce the likelihood of the child resorting to self-injurious behavior in pursuit of sensory experiences.

Classroom Interventions for Depression

Recognizing and addressing mental health challenges in children and adolescents is essential. The lasting negative impacts previously mentioned affect not only those with official diagnoses but also those showing mild signs of depression (Selph & McDonagh, 2019). Schools provide an ideal setting for implementing preventive strategies and identifying students who may be experiencing or at risk for depression (Zhang et al., 2022). Schools can remove obstacles such as geographic barriers, scheduling conflicts, and social stigma by making social-emotional interventions available to all school-aged children. Mental health programs in schools can reach a wider array of students compared to conventional primary care environments, facilitating easier access to services and promoting stronger relationships among peers and educators.

Students may also benefit from frequent feedback on academic, social, and behavioral performance. They often need to be taught how to organize, plan, and execute tasks (Selph & McDonagh, 2019). During the school day, the student may respond positively to the general education teacher checking their emotional state with simple "How are you doing?" questions. When the general education teacher provides interventions in this area for students struggling with mental health, it creates an emotional connection because the student begins to associate the teacher, the classroom, and even the school with a safe environment (Zhang et al., 2022). The general education teacher should always consult with the school mental health provider when needing guidance.

CONCLUSION

To foster a supportive environment, educational organizations should incorporate mental health topics into the curriculum and utilize interactive teaching methods. By introducing preventive strategies early, schools can create a continuous support network that enhances students' emotional well-being and academic performance (Bierman & Sanders, 2020). A trauma-informed approach in the classroom emphasizes creating a safe environment for all students, prioritizing respect, acknowledgment, and open communication (Fazel et al., 2014). By establishing clear expectations and fostering positive interactions, teachers can contribute to a psychological safety culture crucial for effective learning and emotional support.

FUTURE WORK / REFERENCES

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