

# School Psychologists: Providing Mental Health Services to Improve the Lives and Learning of Children and Youth

**Good mental health is important for everyone.** Mental health is as important as physical health to our quality of life. Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness, but also means having the skills necessary to cope with life's challenges. If ignored, mental health problems can interfere with children's learning, development, relationships, and physical health.

School psychologists are mental health professionals who help children and youth overcome barriers to success in school, at home, and in life.

**All youngsters face mental health issues from time to time.**

The U.S. Surgeon General estimates that one in five children and adolescents will experience a significant mental health problem during their school years. Some problems are more serious than others, but all children face challenges that can affect their learning and behavior. These can include:

- Stress and anxiety
- Worries about being bullied
- Problems with family or friends
- Loneliness or rejection
- Disabilities
- Depression
- Thoughts of suicide or hurting others
- Concerns about sexuality
- Academic difficulties
- Dropping out
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Fear of violence, terrorism and war

**School psychologists can help prevent or reduce the immediate and long-term effects of children's mental health problems.**

**Children are remarkably resilient when they get the help they need.** Children and youth thrive when they feel safe and supported. Parents and teachers sometimes need help in their effort to provide a system of support that meets each child's individual needs. Effective support systems include:

- Love and encouragement of parents and family
- Guidance of teachers and other important adults
- Consistent expectations and support
- Access to mental health and other helping professionals
- Services that respect and respond to personal and cultural differences

School psychologists support parents and teachers in their efforts to help children to achieve their best.

**Mental health services for children and youth must be accessible.** Schools are ideal settings to provide mental health services to children and youth. Virtually every community has a school and most youngsters spend six hours a day there with trained, caring professionals.

The school environment is:

- Tailored to learning and development
- A natural context for prevention and intervention
- Connected to community resources
- Familiar and accessible to students and parents
- Designed to promote communication between home and school

**School psychologists provide mental health services that address needs at home and school to help students succeed academically, emotionally, and socially.**

**School psychologists are specially trained to link mental health to learning and behavior.** School psychologists work in schools, clinics, and other health and education settings. They are often the only school mental health professionals trained in child psychology, learning, and development as well as school systems and classroom environments. They use research and results based strategies to promote:

- Good mental health
- High academic achievement
- Positive social skills and behavior
- Tolerance and respect for others
- Safe, supportive learning environments

**School psychologists work with parents, educators, and other mental health services providers to help youngsters develop resiliency, competence, and self-esteem.**

**School psychologists work to find the best solution for each child and each situation.** School psychologists use many different strategies to address individual student needs, as well as enhance systems that support students on the school building and district-wide levels. They lower barriers to healthy learning and behavior through:

**Intervention/Treatment to help children and youth overcome mental health problems.**

- Help families and schools deal with crisis and loss
- Work directly with children and families to address barriers to academic and social success
- Help students develop skills to solve conflicts and problems independently
- Teach students social skills, self-management, and coping strategies
- Consult with teachers on classroom interventions

**Prevention/Early Intervention to prevent or minimize the occurrence of mental health problems.**

- Work with parents and educators to create positive school environments
- Increase awareness of mental health stressors and strategies
- Teach parents and educators skills to address behavior problems
- Screen for mental health and learning problems
- Develop suicide awareness and prevention programs
- Develop school-wide programs to prevent bullying and aggression
- Foster tolerance and understanding of diversity

**Assessment/Diagnosis** to provide accurate information on the nature of a child's problem and the best approach to address it. School psychologists use individual, group, and systems level tools to evaluate:

- Psychological and social competence
- Personality and emotional development
- Academic skills and learning aptitudes
- School climate related to positive behaviors and learning
- Effectiveness of intervention strategies

**Consultation/Case Management** to promote more effective, coordinated support for children's mental health needs.

- Advocate for the needs of individual students both within and outside of the school setting
- Help teachers and parents understand and effectively address a child's problem
- Help families access community resources
- Facilitate coordination between parents, schools, and community services
- Establish and review outcomes of interventions
- Adjust strategies to improve outcomes

**Advocacy/Interagency Collaboration** to promote research-based public policies and programs that improve academic and social outcomes for children and youth.

- Develop and maintain collaborative relationships with community mental health services
- Develop coordinated school/community crisis response
- Consult with policymakers on and advocate for mental health and education legislation
- Seek funding for integrated school/community services
- Link research-based practices to mental health policies and programs
- Provide in-service training for parents, educators, and community members

**School psychologists conduct research and develop "best practices" to support the mental health needs of children and youth.**

The National Association of School Psychologists represents 22,500 school psychologists and related professionals who serve the education and mental health needs of children, adolescents, young adults, and families.

For more information, contact:

**National Association of School Psychologists**

4340 East West Highway, Suite 402

Bethesda, MD 20814

Voice: (301) 657-0270

Fax: (301) 657-0275

TDD: (301) 657-4155

Web: [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)