

Mental Health Day Debrief

Taanvi Arekapudi's Experience in Middle School (2020-2023)

Mental Health Club:

| PROS/What Went Well | CONS/Learnings |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guest Speakers: Valuable insights from guest speakers enhanced student learning, the wide variety of topics we had guest speakers on was helpful to many different students. ● Art Activities: Engaging hands-on learning through creative art activities. ● Positive Posters: Uplifting messages on posters fostered a positive atmosphere in the school itself. ● Inspirational Bookmarks: Motivational bookmarks provided encouragement to students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Name: Embrace the name "Mental Health" Club to create a safe space for students, who really need it. ● Monthly Themes: Organize monthly topics, like September for Suicide Prevention, to focus efforts. ● Holistic Approach: Cover various aspects of mental health throughout the year. ● Collaboration: Partner with other clubs and professionals to maximize impact. ● Student Involvement: Encourage student leadership and engagement in club activities. ● Awareness Campaigns: Conduct initiatives to reduce stigma and provide resources. ● Resource Partnerships: Establish connections with local mental health services/organizations. ● Find Presentations: Something that can save you time is to find like-minded clubs in the world and see their websites or social media. If they posted public presentations you can modify and present them to your club. ● Celebrate Achievements: Recognize accomplishments and progress. ● Leaders: It's okay to get more leaders on board because it can help you delegate more tasks, so you can better fit the club with your schedule, and that way you can recruit more members by saying leadership positions are open. |

Mental Health Resource Fair & Guest Speaker:

| PROS/What Went Well | CONS/Learnings |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Art Murals: Provided by a mental health organization, the art murals allowed students to express themselves creatively and were well-received. ● Effective Communication: Smooth coordination with organizations ensured their timely participation in club activities. ● Personalized Invitations: The counselor personally invited students after lunch, resulting in increased attendance. ● Staggered Schedule: The staggered lunch periods allowed more students to participate and benefit from the club. ● Totally there were about 110 students, because 30 were 6th graders, and about 80 were 7th and 8th graders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student Involvement: Promote student leadership in the resource fair, allowing them to greet and guide their peers for a more relatable experience. ● Strategic Promotion: Utilize the following tips to promote the resource fair effectively listed below. ● Cultural Diversity: Ensure that the participating organizations reflect student culture and diversity. |

Findings:

- *6th Graders: The art murals were well-received by 6th graders, and their participation in the resource fair increased. This could be attributed to the lack of discussion surrounding mental health stigma and the support of friends who encouraged their attendance.*
- *7th Graders: While not as many as the 6th graders, some 7th graders also enjoyed the art murals and participated in the resource fair. However, a significant number of students attended because their friends convinced them to come.*
- *8th Graders: Few 8th graders attended the resource fair, and only a small number of them colored the art murals. This could be due to increased challenges and the difficulty in seeking help. Some students wanted to go but were influenced by their friends to engage in other activities, such as playing in the field.*

Tip: When planning a resource fair at your school, consider the principal's suggestion to promote the event with a focus on art or games before mentioning mental health. This approach can help reduce stigma. By attracting people initially for the artistic or recreational aspect, more individuals, including those who may need mental health resources, are likely to attend. This strategy has shown effectiveness in increasing attendance and engagement.

Mental Health Sharing Mechanisms:

| PROS/What Went Well | CONS/Learnings |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive Activities: The inclusive activities were highly appreciated by everyone, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement among students. • Student-led Strategies: Students particularly enjoyed the strategies shared by their peers. This approach resonated with them and provided relatable guidance. • Time Management: Keeping the sessions short allowed participants to balance their time effectively, enabling them to catch up on missed homework or other responsibilities. • Teacher Engagement: Teachers found value in the strategy-sharing sessions held every Monday morning in May. It gave them an opportunity to reinforce the strategies throughout the week and support their students. • The clarity in Communication: Speaking slowly and clearly helped ensure better understanding and comprehension for all participants. • Students Enjoyed Forms: Students loved being able to not only submit the form to reflect on the strategies benefits to them, but also being able to get a reward, like a fidget toy, or a chance to win a mental health book. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriateness of Responses: When using positive affirmations on platforms like Menti, it is essential to be cautious, as some responses may not be appropriate. • Make sure to talk slowly so students can hear what you're saying. • |

Note: Breaking the stigma surrounding mental health is crucial during middle school, as it is a time when discussing emotions becomes stigmatized and finding support becomes more challenging. Similar to high school where events aim to break the stigma and elementary school where emotions are taught in a nonjudgmental environment, middle school should provide additional resources to help students navigate this overwhelming and challenging phase.