

How we can improve the way we treat students mental health

Our young people are constantly stressed, anxious, and emotionally vulnerable in this age of modern technology. Covid-19 has added to that tenfold by preventing schooling and causing students to stress even more about grades, about friends, and about family. We do have school counselors. We do have access to mental health lines. We do have support systems there ready to catch us. And yet no one actually wants to use them.

Our support systems are fundamentally failing for our young people. Why? I ponder this question a lot. I decided to ask my friends to try to find a solution. I asked if they were stressed about anything. All of them gave the same answer. Of course, they were stressed. Some about home, most about school. Every single one of my friends were on the verge of a breakdown, yet only one has even thought about going to talk to the councillor.

Covid-19 meant all of the yearly stress that all students are used to going through is just going to get worse. Us students haven't had enough class time, we haven't learned everything we need to, we've dropped so many different internals and externals. One small mistake could lead to everything going wrong. But still, no one goes to the councillor. What are we supposed to do about that?

What I suggest we do is making sure the youth are okay. Not through passive methods of posters or an intimidating closed door with the plaque "Councillor" on it, but by actually checking up on the students and making sure they know when enough is enough.

Mental health shouldn't be treated as a bomb. We shouldn't wait for a person to explode before we talk about there being a problem. We shouldn't expect students to be okay just because they're not on the ground sobbing constantly. That is not fair on the students silently suffering. Most of the youth ignore their mental health, hiding it behind layers of self-deprecating humour and jokes. Yet no one is going to say anything about it because it's not their place, it's not their problem. That needs to stop if we are going to get anywhere in dealing with the ever-rising stress levels due to Covid.

We need to address the issue far more directly. All of the students I know are stressed constantly, always talking about how hard it is, and how much they're struggling. But because we are all on the same boat, our stress level feels like it should be normal, should be okay. It isn't. When students get stressed, their first instinct isn't to talk to an adult, it isn't to ask a guidance counsellor. It's to talk to, maybe, a friend if it does end up getting too bad.

We need to break that stigma.

How do we do that?

We can do that by, as adults, talking to students upfront about their mental health and suggesting to them specifically to talk to someone.

We can do that by informing people of the importance of staying connected. Through sharing campaigns like "The Power of Okay", a 3 minute video campaign centering around asking people if they're doing alright.

We can do that through talking to the people in charge of school assemblies and asking them to have a topic on teen mental health, or sending articles by email to the principle about the importance of connecting with our teachers.