

# 10 Ways to Protect & Support Students' Mental Health: A Checklist for Schools

The following information is based on key factors identified in the CDC's Youth Risk and Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report: 2011-2021.

- Know the Risk Factors:** Be aware of the risk factors, or characteristics that make individuals more likely to consider harming themselves. Depression and other mental illnesses, substance use, chronic disease/disability, and bullying and negative experiences with peer relationships put young people more at risk.
- Pay Attention to Other Risks:** Life experiences—survivors of trauma, students who experience loss or major life change, members of the LGBTQ community and those who are culturally unique—can make students more vulnerable and needing of added support.
- Learn Signs of Depression:** Many students struggle with undiagnosed and untreated depression. Symptoms can include withdrawing from activities and friends; persistent sadness; frequent complaints about stomachaches/headaches; excessive sleeping or insomnia; changes in appetite; and a decline in academic performance.
- Be Aware but Not Panicked:** Students who have multiple risk factors may not be on the verge of harming themselves. Most teens will likely have a risk factor or two. Educators need not jump to conclusions while also taking the crisis seriously enough to provide support and prevention.
- Promote Personal Protective Factors:** Students with inner strength and coping skills are better able to weather adversity and less likely to harm themselves. A tailored program for younger students, youth development for older grades, or targeted intervention support for struggling students can help them shore up these skills.
- Explore Outside Expertise:** Consider new courses and curriculum options that can directly address issues such as self-esteem, anxiety, and anger management.
- Evaluate Your Programming:** Gather information about your efforts and ways they can be improved. Once you know what is working and what needs improvement, you can refine your student mental health intervention and prevention programming.
- Build Connectedness and Community Support:** Provide opportunities to incorporate programs that help students build relationships and develop a sense of belonging, including opportunities for all students to participate in school activities and events.
- Increase Access to Mental Health:** Schools can consider incentives to attract and retain school-based social workers and other mental health providers, increase access to on-site mental health services/referrals, and make sure staff/students know how to access them.
- Tap Suicide Prevention Resources:** Research targeted suicide education and prevention programming that can help students identify and cope with intense feelings and compile a list of organizations and share them with students and families.