NTE IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL

DESCRIPTION
Schools must have protocols that clearly define when and how to effectively: a) identify youth who present or are at risk for presenting emotional and/or behavioral difficulties, and b) how to refer students to appropriate services.

RATIONALE
Teachers and school personnel are essential collaborators in helping to identify the mental health needs of students and can help improve early identification of mental health problems. They are in a prime position to be able to identify emotional/behavioral problems in students because they work with them every day. Early identification can lead to earlier treatment and potentially prevent escalation of symptoms. Teachers, mental health and health staff, school administrators, parents, and students should have a clear understanding of available services and be comfortable referring to school mental health services.

The following recommendations can help schools, school mental health providers, parents, and other stakeholders better identify and refer students in need of mental health services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Identifying students who may have mental health problems

1. Take the time to get to know and interact with other professionals in the school and parent groups.

2. Assist teachers in learning how to identify mental health issues, refer students for services, and build strengths in children and adolescents by speaking at staff meetings and offering training sessions.

3. Create a flier or handout that describes services offered by the program and explains how to refer students. Consider posting a user-friendly flyer in each classroom.

4. Offer teacher trainings or workshops in the following areas:
   - Normal and abnormal social and emotional development
   - How to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors
   - Recognizing depression and anxiety in students
   - Encouraging participation for reluctant students
   - Use of classroom systems to prevent disruptive behavior
   - Promoting positive peer interactions between students
   - Addressing teasing and other forms of bullying
   - How to make an effective referral

5. Hold regular information sessions and always have available materials (e.g. flyers) about how to refer students to school mental health services.

6. Create a brief presentation for a parent event that highlights the school mental health services available and how to refer students.

Facilitating Referrals

1. Establish a clear and mutually acceptable protocol with the school for handling internal referrals (to the school mental health program) and external referrals (to [community service providers](#)).

2. Nurture relationships with community service providers and maintain an updated directory of community providers and specialists.

3. Establish a school mental health team that coordinates the entire referral process for the school.

4. Thank referral sources for referrals.

5. Remember the following key information when obtaining a referral:
   - Name of student
   - Date of referral
   - Reason for referral
   - Urgency of referral
   - Source of referral

6. Ensure that the referral process offers the potential for the referral source to remain confidential (from the student).

7. Follow up on referrals with school staff *only when student has given consent that information can be shared.*

   - Use a simple referral feedback form to inform the referral source on what action was taken (e.g., evaluation in progress, family refused services, client attending sessions, family referred to outside services that could better address needs, family did not respond to outreach attempts).
   - Remember to uphold confidentiality in giving feedback to referral sources.

8. Track referrals received in order to assist school mental health programs in understanding who is and who is not referring students.

9. Create a logbook of referrals, date of contacting family, and date of referral feedback. Periodically review logbook and consider how to improve timeliness of the response and feedback.

10. Review the last year of referrals and analyze patterns of referrals and non-referrals. Use this data to strategize about how best to outreach, form, or improve collaborations, and educate stakeholders about school mental health services.

REFERENCES

UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools (n.d.) *Screening/Assessing Students: Indicators and Tools.* Retrieved from http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/student_tt/topic2-review.pdf.

The University of Maryland's Center for School Mental Health (2008). *School Mental Health Quality Assessment Questionnaire (SMHQAQ) Quality Indicator Power points, Indicators 24, 28 and 29*. Retrieved from http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/Resources/Clin/QAIRsrc/QAQPP.

RESOURCES

http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/Helpful%20Forms/Confidential%20Referral%20Form.doc
Sample Referral Form

http://psychservices.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/reprint/52/1/112
On p.112 of this reprint, there is an article on improving mental health referrals between schools and community agencies.