



NEWSLETTER

May 2021 Edition

Contents:

- Social Connections and Relationships Support Child Well-Being
- Lived Experience Insights
- Mental Health 101 – What is Depression?
- Voices of Wisconsin Students
- OCMH Updates
- Legislative & Policy Updates
- Children's Mental Health in Professional Literature
- Of Interest

Welcome to the Office of Children’s Mental Health (OCMH) May Newsletter!

Social Connections and Relationships Support Child Well-Being – OCMH May Fact Sheet

Having strong, positive, and constant sources of social connection allows youth to talk about how they’re feeling in a safe environment. Providing youth with positive childhood experiences, which include supportive relationships with adults, and being socially connected with their peers, family, community, and culture can buffer symptoms of emotional distress.

Kids are socially connected when they have enough relationships that make them feel like they belong, are cared for, valued, and supported. Unfortunately, in Wisconsin kids are not always supported well. Without the protective factor of social connectedness, they may have difficulty becoming resilient in challenging times.

Percentage of kids in Wisconsin who aren’t socially connected (2018/2019):

- 17% are not engaged in school.
- 23% have difficulty making and keeping friends.
- 37% has a family that does not always share ideas well.
- 40% do not live in a supportive neighborhood.
- 55% do not engage in community service.

It is especially important for a teenagers’ physical and psychological health to be part of a social network beyond their family. As they develop their own identity, peers offer support and relief from depression, anxiety, and stress.

The Fact Sheet offers things we can do:

Parents

- Seek out ways for your child to connect with peers early and often so children learn to foster relationships on their own.
- Ask who your child’s friends are, especially in high school.
- Talk with your child about when to foster relationships, when to set boundaries, and when to end relationships.

Schools

- Promote mutual respect in the classroom by reducing any threats of a student being embarrassed or teased.



- Form interdisciplinary teams of teachers who know, and are invested in, students' achievements.

Policy Makers

- Incentivize initiatives and prioritize policies that encourage models of social connectedness, such as integrated care, early intervention, and collaborative activities across sectors.
- Fund youth peer support groups so teens may connect with others and build relationships.

Providers

- Refer families to support groups and encourage utilization of libraries and other low or no-cost options to connect with peers.
- Teach life skills to children so they learn how to be a good friend and maximize their opportunities to socialize.

Read the [Fact Sheet](#).

Lived Experience Insights

OCMH Lived Experience Partner shares their insights on the importance of social connections.

What does it mean to you to be socially connected?

Social connection for me means to feel close and connected to others. It involves feeling loved, cared for, and valued in the relationships that I am a part of.

How have you maintained social connections through the pandemic?

It is definitely tough. I have maintained connections in some way but not even close to the same prior to the pandemic. My family has a circle of people that we allow to be in contact with us and all precautions are still in place. We get food ordered in and we limit the time we can hang out for, even the amount of places we go. These people have been a supportive community in a variety of ways.

There was a church that was looking to support families during the pandemic, specifically a foster family. I said my family would love to have some extra support and they signed me up. They were offering to do anything from grocery shopping, watching children, or meal preps (providing meals). Since my wife and I are foster parents and in a pandemic we just asked for meals at the time, but since then every week they bring a full meal that lasts for a couple days. It takes off some pressure of cooking and it has been a relief. Sometimes I forget it is the day the food is coming, and when it comes, I go this was so needed today! Small things make big changes.

What actions can policy makers, schools, or parents take to ensure social connection?

Actions that policy makers, schools, or parents can take to ensure that social connection is taking place could be: provide a diverse education and various opportunities to enable families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school life as well as provide students with the academic, emotional, and social skills necessary to be actively engaged in school. I noticed that some classroom management and teaching methods effectively create a positive environment. And as always creating trusting and caring relationships to promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and communities.

From Jane Stueber, Office of Children's Mental Health Lived Experience Partner from Milwaukee County

LIVED EXPERIENCE PARTNERS
BUILD CONNECTIONS AND CAPACITY
TO CREATE SYSTEMS CHANGE



Mental Health 101 – Collective Impact Partner experts help us understand basics of mental health

What is Depression?

By: Nichole Wright M.S., NCC, LPC, SUD- Clinic Based Services Director – Journey Mental Health Center

Depression is a common and serious mental health illness that can severely impact mood and daily life. Depression symptoms can range from loss of interest in hobbies, loss of sleep, changes in eating habits, and decreased energy level, to even a lowered self-esteem. Some individuals can also have suicidal thoughts, thoughts about dying or taking one's own life. Depression can be triggered by different things – genetics significant life events such as the loss of employment, housing, or the death of a loved one. Depression is treatable and many individuals have success in using medication and psychotherapy to manage and even alleviate their symptoms.



Voices of Wisconsin Students

How are students in Wisconsin coping during the COVID-19 pandemic? Better understanding this was the purpose of the Voices of Wisconsin Students Project. The project reported on how high school and middle school students are coping with school, learning, and building resilience during the pandemic, as well as identifying their sources of stress and anxiety and the support they need.



Summary of key themes:

- **High (and increasing) stress, anxiety, and depression.** There are multiple contributing factors here including: challenges with virtual learning; keeping up with homework; lack of connections with teachers; concerns about grades and study skills; concerns about their futures; diminished social opportunities; and limited access to support.
- **Significant challenges with virtual learning environments.** Challenges cited included: significant increases in workload; lack of engaging ways of learning; lack of hands-on learning; difficulties accessing teachers for help; feeling “forgotten”; increased distractions at home; challenges; and lack of concern about mental health.
- **Lack of connectedness to school, teachers, and friends.** Comments here included: lack of connectedness to school, teachers, and friends was more pronounced for virtual learners; students deeply miss opportunities to socialize; freshmen feel especially disconnected; and sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities help students feel more connected. On the other hand, the common experience of the pandemic helps some students feel less alone.
- **Students have heightened expectations of their teachers.** Comments included: the increased importance of student-teacher dynamics and the inability to access help when needed.
- **Limited awareness of mental health resources.** Comments included: limited awareness of school-based resources of mental health and wellness support; students referenced school counselors but many noted they are often busy; need for more resources at school, and many deal with feelings on their own. With these resources being limited, students rely on friends as their primary source of support and then parents.

- **Stigma, skepticism, and concerns about confidentiality are barriers to accessing help .**
Comments included: stigma was the main reason students do not seek help; skepticism about whether getting help will work or how to talk about what they are feeling; breaches of trust and concerns about confidentiality; and school counselors are “too busy”.
- **Perceived increases in substance use among peers.** Comments included: students perceived increases in use of drugs (marijuana), alcohol, and vaping products due to a lack of other healthy coping mechanisms, boredom, and to alleviate feelings of fear and isolation. Others felt the pandemic may decrease substance use due to less access.
- **Despite challenges, students have developed new coping skills and ways to be resilient .**
Comment included: gratitude for family, friends, and their health and safety; appreciation for school, especially in-person; more time for sleep; new skills resulting from time in virtual learning (self-advocacy, time-management, understanding of learning preferences, increased comfort in being alone); and new hobbies.

Copies of the report are available [here](#).

To gather this feedback researchers conducted a total of 23 virtual Zoom focus groups in January and February 2021 with a total of 160 Wisconsin students (64 middle school students and 96 high school students). The students were from 38 different counties and 68 different rural, urban, and suburban communities. The students attend 96 different public, private, and parochial schools.

The research was conducted by the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) Research Partners and the Medical College of Wisconsin. The project was supported by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

OCMH Updates

Parent Leaders with Child Welfare Experience

OCMH has coordinated a group of parent leaders with experience in Child Welfare. Their April meeting focused on child safety assessment, understanding, and planning. Parents had a lot to share about their experience and knowledge of safety planning decisions and options. Here’s a few things parents shared that they need better understanding of:

- how and why safety decisions are made
- how their parenting behavior impacted child safety
- what’s their role in safety planning
- how their friends and families can be a support

Next month parents will continue to think about the questions they have and information they need related to case planning.

Children’s Mental Health Awareness

Children’s Mental Health Awareness week was May 2-8, 2021. The Wisconsin Office of Children’s Mental Health held a number of events to celebrate:

- **Wisconsin Youth Virtual Art Gallery** – Mental health looks different for everyone – what does it look like for you? That was the question youth artists across the state considered and developed art around. [See their art](#).
- **Teens Speak about their Mental Health** – In a panel discussion, teens talked about how mental health looks for them. [Hear their conversation](#).
- **Voices of Wisconsin Students Panel Podcast** – Two Bald Guys & a Mic podcast hosts interviewed state representatives (Kate McCoy – Department of Public Instruction, Jason Cram –

Department of Health Services, and Linda Hall – Office of Children’s Mental Health) on the Voices of Wisconsin Students Project that reported on high school and middle school students’ feelings on how COVID-19 has impacted their learning, coping, and resilience. [Listen to the podcast.](#)

- **Governor Tony Evers** issued a [proclamation](#) recognizing May 6, 2021 as Children's Mental Health Awareness Day throughout the state of Wisconsin

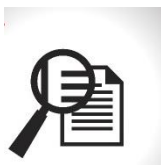
Legislative & Policy Update

State Biennial Budget. On May 6th, the Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee (JFC) began its consideration of Governor Evers’ budget proposal. Their first action was to remove from the budget nearly 400 items they said were non-fiscal. However almost half of the items removed have a monetary or fiscal effect. JFC will continue its work on the budget throughout the month.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). States now know how much money to expect from ARPA, but are awaiting federal guidelines on how the money can be spent. DHS is awaiting guidance on nearly \$50 million to be added to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Block Grants. The Department of Administration is awaiting ARPA guidance before it determines how to develop grant guidelines for \$50 million targeted to community organizations supporting children after school.

Children’s Mental Health in Professional Literature

OCMH Senior Research Analyst Melissa Murphy spotlights new, open access articles about children’s mental health.



Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19. [Read article.](#)

The effects of social deprivation on adolescent development and mental health. [Read article.](#)

"I'm Kinda Stuck at Home With Unsupportive Parents Right Now": LGBTQ Youths' Experiences With COVID-19 and the Importance of Online Support. [Read article.](#)

Playing the complex game of social status in school – a qualitative study. [Read article.](#)

More articles are available on the [OCMH Website](#).

Of Interest

PATCH Hiring Teens across the state – Wisconsin PATCH is accepting applications for teen educators and youth advocates. PATCH stands for Providers and Teens Communicating for Health. Positions are available in person in Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison, Milwaukee, and Wausau, as well as virtually for youth anywhere in the state of Wisconsin. Application deadline is June 13th. For [information](#).

May is Mental Health Awareness Month and has been observed in the U.S. since 1949. Join [NAMI](#) in raising awareness about mental health – fight stigma, provide support, educate the public, and advocate

for policies that support people with mental illness and their families. Additional resources: [Mental Health Connection](#), [Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective](#), [The Trevor Project](#), [This is My Brave](#).

May is Resilient Wisconsin Month— Governor Evers proclaimed May Resilient Wisconsin Month. See the [proclamation](#). Visit the [Resilient Wisconsin website](#).

May is **Foster Care Awareness Month**. [The Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center](#) provides great resources to learn more about foster care, the needs of kids in foster care, and how you can get involved.

Pathways helps mental health clinicians expand their work with young children and families. The Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health has no-cost professional development opportunities for mental health clinicians. [For information](#).

Birth to 3 Program: First 1,000 Days Wisconsin Child Find Campaign – DHS want every parent of caregiver of a child with a delay or disability to be aware of the Birth to 3 Program, understand the benefits of early intervention, and know how to access the program.

The Office of Children’s Mental Health
Children.wi.gov
OCMH@wisconsin.gov • Follow us on Twitter @WIKidsMH