TeachME PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CEUs for Teachers and Educators

Psychological and Social Issues Facing School-Aged Youth

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Introduction

As children and adolescents navigate their way through the school system, they are faced with a myriad of psychological and social challenges that can have a significant impact on their lives. Studies show that one in six U.S. children aged 6 to 17 years old experience a mental health disorder each year, with half of mental health conditions beginning by age 14 (NAMI, 2023). Thus, the majority of educators will encounter students struggling with psychosocial challenges. As such, it is crucial for educators to understand the complexity of these issues, how they can affect the academic, emotional, and social development of young people, and how to best support these students.

This course will explore a range of topics related to the psychosocial issues impacting school-aged youth. The modules will explore the most common psychosocial issues faced by youth today, mental health concerns, academic and learning challenges caused by psychosocial issues, and the role that teachers and schools can play in supporting students. By understanding these issues, educators can support young people in achieving their full potential.

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Section 1: Psychosocial Issues Faced by Youth Today

Section 1 will introduce the concept of psychosocial issues and discuss their prevalence among children. We will explore the various factors that contribute to these struggles and how they can affect a child's academic performance and social development. In this section we will define psychosocial issues, identify common psychosocial issues faced by kids, discuss the impact of psychosocial issues on academic performance and social development, and explore factors that contribute to psychosocial issues.

What are Psychosocial Issues?

Psychosocial issues refer to a broad range of mental health problems that affect an individual's social, emotional, and psychological well-being. These issues are often interconnected and can impact a person's academic performance, social relationships, and daily functioning (Holland & Riley, 2018). Young people are particularly vulnerable to developing psychosocial issues due to the many challenges they face during their formative years, including academic pressures, social expectations, and family dynamics (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2018). This section will explore the definition of psychosocial issues and their prevalence among children.

Definition of Psychosocial Issues

Psychosocial issues refer to a range of psychological and social problems that individuals face simultaneously. These issues can include anxiety, depression, trauma, behavioral issues, bullying, and social isolation (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2018). These issues are often complex and can have multiple contributing factors, including genetic, environmental, and social factors (Center for Mental Health).

Prevalence of Psychosocial Issues among School-Aged Youth

Psychosocial issues are prevalent among school-aged youth, and the rates of these issues appear to be increasing. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2021), approximately one in six U.S. children aged 2 to 8 years old has a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder. Furthermore, a recent study found that over 20% of adolescents aged 13 to 18 experienced a mental health disorder in the past year (Merikangas et al., 2018). More specifically, according to a national survey of children's health conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2019, approximately 7.7% of children aged 6-17 years (an estimated 4.4 million children) have a current

diagnosis of anxiety, and 3.2% (an estimated 1.8 million children) have a current diagnosis of depression (CDC, 2020). In addition, approximately 6% of children aged 2-17 years (an estimated 3.5 million children) have a current diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (CDC, 2020).

Seeking Support

The prevalence of school-aged youth seeking treatment for mental health issues has increased in recent years, highlighting the need for effective mental health support in schools. However, a large number of school-aged youth who require psychosocial support do not, or cannot, seek it. Several studies have examined the prevalence of mental health treatment seeking among school-aged youth. One study found that among U.S. children aged 6 to 17 years old who had a mental health disorder in the past year, only 50.6% received any treatment for their condition (Perou et al., 2018). Another study found that among adolescents with a past-year mental health disorder, only about 39% received treatment (Ghandour et al., 2019).

The reasons for not seeking treatment for mental health issues are varied and complex. Barriers to seeking and receiving mental health treatment include stigma, lack of access to services, and inadequate insurance coverage (Ghandour et al., 2019). Stigma associated with mental health disorders and treatment is a significant barrier for many individuals, including children and adolescents. In some cases, young people and their families may not recognize the signs of a mental health problem, or they may be hesitant to seek help due to concerns about confidentiality or cost. Access to mental health services can also be a challenge for some families, particularly in rural or low-income areas where resources may be limited.

Disparities in mental health treatment seeking among different populations are also a concern. Research suggests that children from racial/ethnic minority and

low-income backgrounds are less likely to receive mental health treatment than their peers (Perou et al., 2018; Ghandour et al., 2019).

These statistics highlight the importance of addressing psychosocial issues among school-aged youth. By providing targeted support and interventions, educators and other professionals can help students to manage their emotions and behaviors, improve academic performance, and enhance overall well-being.

Why School-Age Youth are Vulnerable

School-age youth are more vulnerable to psychosocial issues due to a combination of factors related to their physical, cognitive, and emotional development, as well as environmental stressors they face in their daily lives. According to a study by Hurrell et al. (2019), children and adolescents are at an increased risk of developing psychosocial issues due to the complexity and rapid pace of changes they undergo during their developmental years. These changes include physical, hormonal, and cognitive developments, which can contribute to heightened emotional sensitivity, mood instability, and behavioral changes.

Additionally, school-age youth are exposed to a variety of environmental stressors that can impact their mental health, such as academic pressure, social expectations, and family dynamics (Elmi et al., 2019). Academic pressure is one of the most significant stressors that school-age youth face, with many experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety related to academic performance and success (Lee et al., 2020). This pressure can contribute to the development of mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. While depression, anxiety, ADHD, and other mental health problems in young people can be rooted in genetics, “many of their troubling symptoms would not have developed if their environmental circumstances had been appropriately different” (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2018).

Social expectations and peer pressure are also significant stressors that school-age youth face. They can experience bullying and social isolation, which can contribute to the development of low self-esteem and other psychosocial issues (Elmi et al., 2019). Finally, family dynamics such as divorce, conflict, and abuse can also impact the mental health and well-being of school-age youth (Hurrell et al., 2019).

The combination of developmental changes and environmental stressors makes school-age youth particularly vulnerable to developing psychosocial issues. It is essential for educators and caregivers to be aware of these factors and provide appropriate support and resources to help children and adolescents navigate these challenges.

Factors Contributing to Psychosocial Issues

Psychosocial issues among school-aged youth can be caused by a range of factors, including biological, environmental, cultural, and familial factors. Several risk factors have been associated with psychosocial issues in students. These include:

- **Genetic predisposition** - Some psychosocial issues, such as ADHD, have a genetic component. Furthermore, research has found that genetics can play a role in the development of psychosocial issues, particularly when combined with environmental factors (Dekin, 2022).
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** - ACEs, such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, can have a lasting impact on a child's psychosocial development. Studies consistently show that exposure to ACEs was associated with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and other psychosocial issues in adulthood (CDC, 2019).
- **Socioeconomic Status** - Children from low-income families are more likely to experience psychosocial issues than those from higher-income families. Research has found that poverty can contribute to stress, family conflict,

and other factors that impact psychosocial development (Francis et al., 2018).

- **Home and School Environment** - Parental mental health, parenting practices, and family dynamics can all impact a child's psychosocial development. Wolicki et al. (2018) found that children of parents with mental health issues were more likely to experience psychosocial issues themselves. Further, factors such as bullying, peer relationships, and academic stress can all contribute to psychosocial issues.

Students who experience one or more of these risk factors are more likely to develop psychosocial issues. Additionally, some students may be at higher risk due to their developmental stage or personal characteristics, such as gender or sexual orientation. Research also shows that certain subgroups of youth, some mentioned above, are at a higher risk for psychosocial issues due to a variety of factors, such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

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Socioeconomic Status

Adolescents from low-income families may experience more psychosocial issues such as depression, anxiety, and behavior problems. For example, a study by Veselska et al. (2019) found that low-income adolescents in the Czech Republic reported more psychosocial problems, including a higher prevalence of depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem compared to their peers from higher-income families. Likewise, a study of over 1,000 children in an urban school district found that nearly one-third of children from low-income families had symptoms of depression or anxiety (Lopez, Nussbaum, & O'Connor, 2018). Youth from low-income families are more likely to experience psychosocial issues due to a variety of factors, including increased stress and exposure to ACEs, limited access to

healthcare and mental health services, and social and environmental factors that may negatively affect their mental health.

Increased stress and exposure to ACEs

Children from low-income families are more likely to experience stress and adversity, such as exposure to violence, family conflict, and poverty, which can contribute to the development of psychosocial issues. A study by Chen and Paterson (2019) found that children from low-income families in the United States were more likely to experience ACEs, which in turn was associated with a higher risk for mental health problems.

Limited access to healthcare and mental health services

Low-income families may face barriers to accessing healthcare and mental health services due to factors such as lack of insurance, transportation, and availability of services. A study by Owens et al. (2018) found that low-income children in the United States were less likely to receive mental health services than their higher-income peers, even when they had similar levels of need.

Social and environmental factors. Children from low-income families may also be exposed to social and environmental factors that negatively affect their mental health, such as living in unsafe neighborhoods, experiencing food insecurity, and lacking access to quality education. A study by Casey et al. (2018) found that children from low-income families in the United States were more likely to experience chronic stress due to factors such as family conflict, discrimination, and community violence, which in turn was associated with higher rates of depression and anxiety.

Race/Ethnicity

Racism and discrimination have been linked to various psychosocial issues impacting youth. Specifically, research has shown that experiences of racism and

discrimination can negatively impact mental health, increase stress levels, and lead to various psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. A study by Martin et al. (2018) found that African American adolescents who experienced racism reported higher levels of depressive symptoms and lower levels of self-esteem. Another study by Huynh and Fuligni (2018) found that Asian American adolescents who reported higher levels of discrimination experienced more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem.

Racism can also lead to internalized racism, where young people may start to believe negative stereotypes about their own racial or ethnic group. This can have a negative impact on their self-esteem and identity. Juang et al. (2019) found that experiences of racism were associated with higher levels of internalized racism among Asian American adolescents.

Gender & Sexual Orientation

LGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk for psychosocial issues such as depression and suicidal ideation. A study by Wang et al. (2019) found that LGBTQ+ youth in China reported higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to heterosexual youth. Another study by Mustanski et al. (2018) determined that LGBTQ+ youth in the United States had higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempts compared to their heterosexual peers. Transgender and gender non-conforming youth are also at higher risk for psychosocial issues. Clark et al. (2018) found that transgender youth in Canada reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to their cisgender peers. Another study by Reisner et al. (2019) found that transgender and gender non-conforming youth in the United States had higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to cisgender youth.

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Recognizing Psychosocial Issues in Students

Psychosocial issues are complex and varied, and they can manifest in a variety of ways, making them difficult to identify. However, recognizing the signs and symptoms of psychosocial struggles is crucial for educators to provide appropriate support to students. Students experiencing psychosocial issues may exhibit a wide range of signs and symptoms. Teachers can play an important role in recognizing psychosocial issues in youth. Some ways that teachers can be there for students who may be struggling include the following:

- Observing Behavioral Changes: Teachers should observe changes in behavior, including changes in mood, social interactions, and academic performance (APA, 2019). For example, a student who was previously outgoing and talkative may suddenly become withdrawn and quiet. Teachers should be aware that such changes in behavior may indicate a psychosocial issue.
    - Changes may include sadness, increased irritability, aggression, or social withdrawal.
    - Research has found that mood and behavior changes are common in youth experiencing psychosocial issues, such as depression and anxiety (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021)
    - Difficulty concentrating or paying attention in class
    - Changes in academic performance
        - This may include poor grades, lack of participation, or difficulty with assignments. Research has found that psychosocial issues, such as ADHD, can impact academic performance in youth (WHO).

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- Fatigue or low energy
- Physical complaints, such as headaches or stomach aches
    - These symptoms may be related to stress or anxiety. Research has found that youth experiencing psychosocial issues may report more physical symptoms than their peers (WHO).
- Substance use or abuse

It is important to note that these signs and symptoms may vary depending on the specific issue and the individual student. Furthermore, not all students with psychosocial issues exhibit obvious symptoms, making it challenging for educators to identify and support them.

- Listening to students: Teachers should listen to what their students have to say. Students may share information about their home life, relationships, or other personal issues that could be indicative of a psychosocial issue. Teachers should be aware that students may not always use direct language to express their concerns, so active listening is crucial (ED, 2019).
- Recognizing risk factors: Teachers should be aware of risk factors for psychosocial issues, such as trauma, abuse, neglect, and poverty. Students who experience these risk factors may be more likely to experience psychosocial issues, so teachers should be alert to signs of distress in these students (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019).
- Collaborating with school counselors: Teachers should collaborate with school counselors to identify and address psychosocial issues in their students. School counselors can provide valuable support and resources to both teachers and students (American School Counselor Association, 2018).

Most Common Psychosocial Issues Among School-Age Youth

School-aged youth face a range of psychosocial issues that can significantly impact their academic performance and overall wellbeing. The most common issues include anxiety and depression, attention and behavioral issues such as ADHD and conduct disorder, trauma, bullying, and social isolation.

Emotional Disorders in School-Aged Youth

Anxiety and depression are among the most prevalent mental health concerns among school-aged youth (Merikangas et al., 2018). These conditions are characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and panic or excessive worrying, which can affect students' academic performance, social interactions, and overall well being. Left untreated, anxiety and depression can lead to serious consequences such as suicide and substance abuse.

Anxiety

Anxiety disorders are estimated to affect up to 20% of children and adolescents (Ghandour et al., 2019). Anxiety can manifest in a variety of ways, including excessive worry, physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches, avoidance of certain situations or activities, and difficulty sleeping (NIMH, 2022). Anxiety can be a normal and adaptive response to stress, but when it becomes chronic or interferes with daily functioning, it may require intervention.

Supporting Students with Anxiety. Teachers play an important role in identifying students who may be experiencing anxiety and helping to connect them with appropriate resources, as well as providing students with a learning environment that mitigates symptoms of anxiety. One effective strategy is to create a classroom environment that is supportive and fosters a sense of belonging. This can include regular check-ins with students, opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration, and clear expectations for behavior and academic performance

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(Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018). Teachers can also work with school counselors or mental health professionals to develop strategies for helping students cope with anxiety, such as relaxation techniques or cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions.

In addition, there are several evidence-based interventions that teachers can implement to support students with anxiety. One such intervention is the FRIENDS program, which is a school-based CBT program designed to teach students coping strategies for managing anxiety and stress (Barrett et al., 2018). Another program, the Coping Power Program, focuses on building resilience and social-emotional skills in at-risk youth. These interventions are typically delivered in small group or individual settings and can be implemented by school counselors or mental health professionals.

It is also important for teachers to be aware of potential triggers for anxiety in the classroom. For example, students with anxiety may struggle with public speaking or large group activities, so it may be helpful to provide alternative assignments or accommodations. Teachers can also be mindful of the language they use when giving feedback to students, as overly critical or harsh feedback may exacerbate anxiety symptoms (Hart & Pellegrini, 2019). Finally, teachers can encourage students to seek out resources and support, such as talking to a trusted adult or seeking counseling services.

Depression in School-Aged Youth

Depression is a serious mental health disorder that affects a significant number of school-aged children and adolescents. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), approximately 3% of children aged 6-12 and 12% of adolescents aged 13-18 experience major depressive disorder (NIMH, 2020). Depression can have a significant impact on a child'ren's academic and social functioning, as well as their overall quality of life. There are several risk factors for

depression in children and adolescents, including family history of depression, stressful life events, and chronic illness (Luby, 2018). Teachers play a significant role in supporting students who are experiencing depression, as they spend a significant amount of time with students in the classroom.

Specific symptoms of depression in children and adolescents can include sadness, irritability, fatigue, difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much, changes in appetite or weight, difficulty concentrating, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide (NIMH, 2020). It is important for teachers to be aware of these symptoms and to have a plan in place for supporting students who may be experiencing depression.

Supporting Students with Depression. One important aspect of supporting students with depression is promoting a positive school climate that emphasizes social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL programs, which will be discussed in greater detail later, can help students develop coping skills and emotional regulation strategies that can help prevent depression and other mental health disorders (United States Department of Education [ED], 2021). Additionally, teachers can provide support to students by encouraging open communication, offering empathy and understanding, and connecting students and families to mental health resources when necessary.

Attention & Behavioral Issues in School-Aged Youth

Attention and behavioral issues such as ADHD and conduct disorder are also prevalent among school-aged youth (NIMH, 2021). ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, which can make it challenging for students to focus and complete tasks (NIMH). Conduct disorder, on the other hand, is a behavioral disorder characterized by aggressive and antisocial behaviors such as stealing, fighting, and lying, which can lead to academic and legal consequences (NIMH).

Behavioral issues can have a significant impact on a students' academic and social functioning, as well as their overall well-being. There are many factors that can contribute to behavioral issues in school-aged youth, including environmental factors such as poverty, trauma, and family conflict, as well as individual factors such as ADHD, learning disabilities, and mental health disorders (Miller, 2022). It is important for teachers to be aware of these risk factors and to have strategies in place for identifying and supporting students who may be experiencing behavioral issues.

Addressing Behavioral Issues

Behavioral issues are a common concern for teachers working with school-aged youth. These issues can range from minor disruptions in the classroom to more serious problems such as aggression, defiance, and substance abuse (WHO, 2021). When behavioral issues are not addressed, a classroom can become chaotic. Research-based strategies for addressing behavioral and attention issues include using a PBIS system, a trauma-informed approach, and collaborating with families and professionals.

PBIS. One effective strategy for addressing behavioral issues in school-aged youth is through the use of positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). PBIS is a proactive approach to behavior management that focuses on teaching and reinforcing positive behaviors rather than punishing negative behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2020). PBIS has been shown to be effective in reducing problem behaviors and improving academic outcomes for students (Sugai & Horner, 2020).

PBIS involves a tiered system of support, with universal strategies for all students, targeted strategies for students who may be at risk for behavioral issues, and individualized strategies for students with more significant behavioral challenges (Sugai & Horner, 2020). The universal strategies include establishing clear behavior expectations, providing positive reinforcement for desired behavior, and regularly

acknowledging and celebrating positive behavior. Targeted strategies may include additional support and interventions for students who are at risk for behavioral issues, while individualized strategies involve developing individualized behavior plans and providing ongoing support and intervention for students with more significant behavioral challenges (Sugai & Horner).

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of PBIS in reducing problem behaviors and improving academic outcomes for students. A meta-analysis of 96 studies on PBIS found that it had a significant effect on reducing problem behavior, increasing academic performance, and improving school climate (Waasdorp et al., 2018). Another study found that schools implementing PBIS had significantly lower rates of suspension and expulsion compared to schools without PBIS (Gage et al., 2020).

Trauma-Informed Practices

Another important aspect of addressing behavioral issues in school-aged youth is through the use of trauma-informed practices. Many students who exhibit behavioral issues have experienced trauma, which can have a significant impact on their behavior, academic performance and well-being (Peters et al., 2019). Teachers can support these students by creating a safe classroom environment, using trauma-informed language and strategies, and connecting students and families to appropriate resources for addressing trauma.

Trauma-informed practices involve understanding and responding to the impact of trauma on students' behavior and well-being. Trauma-informed practices emphasize the importance of building positive relationships with students, providing opportunities for choice and control, and creating a sense of safety and predictability in the classroom (Peters et al.). Trauma-informed practices also involve using language that is empowering and supportive rather than

stigmatizing, such as referring to students as "survivors" rather than "victims" of trauma (Peters et al.).

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices in improving students' academic and behavioral outcomes. For example, a study of trauma-informed practices in an elementary school found that students who received trauma-informed support had significantly lower rates of office disciplinary referrals and higher rates of academic achievement compared to students who did not receive trauma-informed support (Kraatz et al., 2019).

Collaboration with Families and Professionals

Collaboration with families and professionals is an essential aspect of supporting students with behavioral issues. Effective collaboration with families involves building positive and respectful relationships, engaging families in the problem-solving process, and providing ongoing communication and support (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2018). Likewise, this may involve working with school counselors or mental health professionals to address underlying mental health or behavioral concerns. Collaboration with mental health professionals may involve referring students to appropriate resources for mental health support, working collaboratively with mental health professionals to develop behavior plans, and incorporating evidence-based interventions for mental health concerns (Sheridan & Kratochwill). Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of collaboration with families and professionals in improving outcomes for students.

Trauma

Trauma is another psychosocial issue that can have a significant impact on students' academic and social functioning. A trauma response is a psychological and physiological response to an event or series of events that threaten a person's safety or sense of well-being (Leonard, 2020). Traumatic experiences can have a significant impact on school-aged youth and can lead to a variety of physical,

emotional, and behavioral symptoms. Trauma can result from a wide range of experiences, including abuse, neglect, violence, accidents, natural disasters, and medical procedures (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019). These experiences can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other mental health issues that can interfere with students' academic and social lives, as well as overall development (National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], 2018).

Common Types of Trauma in School-Age Youth

School-aged youth can experience various types of traumatic events that can have a significant impact on their psychosocial well-being. The NCTSN (2018) identifies and describes the following common types of trauma experienced by school-aged youth:

- Physical abuse: Physical abuse is the intentional use of physical force against a child that results in or has the potential to result in physical harm, injury, or even death. Physical abuse can include hitting, slapping, kicking, shaking, or burning.
- Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse is any sexual activity between an adult and a child, or between two children, where one of the children is significantly older or more powerful than the other. Sexual abuse can take many forms, including touching, fondling, penetration, and exposure to pornography.
- Emotional abuse: Emotional abuse involves acts or omissions by caregivers that cause or could cause serious behavioral, cognitive, or emotional problems in a child. This can include verbal abuse, such as belittling or criticizing the child, as well as withholding love, support, or attention.

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- Neglect: Neglect is the failure of a caregiver to provide for the child's basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and education. Neglect can be physical, emotional, or educational.
- Community violence: Exposure to community violence refers to the witnessing or experiencing of violence in the neighborhood or community. Community violence can include shootings, stabbings, and other forms of violence that occur outside the home.
- Natural disasters: Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and wildfires, can be traumatic for children who experience them. These events can cause physical harm, displacement, and loss of loved ones and possessions.

It is important for teachers to understand these common types of trauma and their impact on school-aged youth. By recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma, teachers can provide support and help students cope with their experiences.

Bullying, Social Isolation, and Peer Pressure

Bullying and social isolation are other psychosocial issues that can significantly impact school-aged youth. Bullying refers to intentional and repeated aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and victim (NCTSN, 2018). Bullying can take many forms, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, and can lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021). Social isolation, on the other hand, refers to a lack of social connections and support, which can cause feelings of loneliness and rejection (Almeida et al., 2021). Social isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness, depression, and low self-esteem, and can make it challenging for students to form positive relationships with their peers and teachers (Almeida et al.).

Addressing Bullying and Social Isolation

Teachers play an essential role in addressing bullying and social isolation in their classrooms. By creating a safe and inclusive learning environment, teachers can promote positive social interactions and prevent the occurrence of bullying (Espelage et al., 2018). Teachers can also identify students who may be experiencing social isolation and provide opportunities for them to connect with their peers and feel a sense of belonging (Espelage et al.).

Interventions aimed at reducing bullying and social isolation have been developed and implemented in schools. For example, school-wide programs that promote positive behavior and encourage a sense of community have been shown to be effective in reducing bullying (Gaffney et al., 2021). Peer mentoring programs and social skills training have also been used to improve social connections and reduce social isolation (Tanyu, 2019).

Section 1 Conclusion

Psychosocial issues are a prevalent and complex problem faced by children today. These issues can have a significant impact on a child's academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. While the causes of psychosocial issues are multifaceted, it is crucial for teachers to be aware of the prevalence and potential impact of these issues on their students. With a deeper understanding of psychosocial issues, teachers can play a vital role in identifying and supporting children with mental health problems, promoting a positive and inclusive classroom environment, and facilitating early intervention and treatment for those in need.

Section 1 Key Terms

Cisgender - A person who has a gender identity that matches their sex assigned at birth

Psychosocial Issues - A broad range of mental health problems that affect an individual's social, emotional, and psychological well-being

Transgender - A person whose gender identity does not match with their sex assigned at birth

Trauma - Any experience that overwhelms a person's ability to cope and can include physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence or natural disasters

Trauma-Informed Practices - Describes a framework for working with and relating to people who have experienced negative consequences after exposure to trauma

Trauma Response - A psychological and physiological response to an event or series of events that threaten a person's safety or sense of well-being (e.g. fight or flight)

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Section 1 Discussion Questions

1. What role do you think parents and family dynamics play in contributing to psychosocial issues in children, and how can teachers work with families to address these issues?
2. In what ways do you see psychosocial issues impact a child's academic performance, and how can teachers create a supportive learning environment for these students?
3. In your practice, how do you identify and support students who have experienced trauma, and what resources are available in your school and community to help students cope with traumatic experiences?
4. What strategies do you implement to support students who identify as LGBTQ+ and may be at a higher risk for psychosocial issues due to societal stigma and discrimination?

5. What do you do to work collaboratively with families and community resources to support students who may be at a higher risk for psychosocial issues?

Section 1 Activities

1. Performing a Google search, find a trauma-informed practice self-assessment tool for teachers.

    a. Complete the assessment to evaluate how trauma-informed your current teaching practices are.

    b. Discuss your results with your colleagues, focusing on both areas of strength and areas of improvement. If you're working by yourself, write a short reflection on your results.

    c. Brainstorm ideas of how to improve trauma-informed practices in your classroom and at your school. If you're working with others, share any strategies that have been effective in working with students that experienced trauma.

    d. Create an action plan for improving in one area of your self-assessment

2. Read the following scenario and follow-up activities: Jenny is a 13-year-old student who has always been outgoing, talkative, and a high-achiever. However, in recent weeks, her teacher has noticed significant changes in her behavior. Samantha has become more withdrawn and quiet, and she seems to have lost interest in school and extracurricular activities. She is no longer participating in class discussions and is frequently absent. Jenny's teacher found out that her parents are going through a divorce, and Jenny has been having a difficult time coping with the changes at home.

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a. With a partner (if available) or independently, identify the psychosocial symptoms that Samantha is experiencing.

b. Discuss how observing behavioral changes, understanding risk factors and active listening might help support students like Jenny.

c. Discuss resources that Jenny's teacher can provide her with.

3. Perform research and create a folder of resources for students who
4. are going through various psychosocial issues, such as anxiety, depression, bullying, trauma, etc. You should include community resources such as mental health clinics, support groups, and counseling services, as well as school resources, contact information, and resources in the community. Inform students about the resource and make it anonymously accessible to them and their families.

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Section 2: The Impacts of Psychosocial Issues & Trauma

Psychosocial issues and trauma can have a significant impact on school-age youth and their development, mental health, social functioning, and academic performance. These issues can range from behavioral and emotional difficulties to social and environmental stressors. This section provides an overview of the impacts of trauma and psychosocial issues on school-age youth and the importance of addressing these issues in an educational setting.

Trauma & Development

Trauma is defined as any experience that overwhelms a person's ability to cope and can include physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence or natural disasters (NCTSN, 2019). Trauma actually impacts brain

structure and development, particularly in children and adolescents whose brains are still developing. The effects of trauma can be immediate and long-lasting and can impact emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functioning (APA, 2020).

In terms of brain development, trauma can disrupt the growth and functioning of key brain areas, including the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus (Maynard, 2020). The prefrontal cortex is responsible for executive functioning, decision-making, and emotional regulation, while the amygdala and hippocampus are involved in processing and regulating emotions and memories (Maynard). Trauma can alter the structure and functioning of these brain regions in several ways. For example, trauma can lead to a reduction in the volume of the prefrontal cortex, which can impair decision-making and emotional regulation; trauma can also lead to an overactive amygdala, which can result in heightened emotional reactivity and difficulty regulating emotions (Woo et al., 2021). These changes can cause children who have experienced trauma to have strong emotional reactions to situations, with less rationality. Additionally, trauma can impair the functioning of the hippocampus, which plays a critical role in memory processing and consolidation. Trauma can lead to a reduction in the volume of the hippocampus, as well as impairments in its functioning. This can result in difficulties with memory recall and emotional regulation (Woo et al.). Children who experience trauma may be at increased risk for a range of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (NCTSN, 2019).

However, it is important to note that not all children who experience trauma will develop mental health problems. The severity and duration of the trauma, as well as a child's individual resilience and coping skills, can all influence the impact of trauma on brain development and mental health outcomes (NCTSN, 2019). Resilient children who have supportive relationships with caring adults, a sense of competence and self-efficacy, and the ability to regulate their emotions and behavior are less likely to develop mental health problems (NCTSN). As educators,

it's important to be aware of the potential impact of trauma on children's development and to provide appropriate support and resources to help children cope and recover from traumatic experiences.

Impacts of Psychosocial Issues on Academic Performance

The psychosocial issues faced by school-aged youth can have a significant impact on their academic performance. One of the primary impacts of psychosocial issues on school-age youth is a decline in academic performance (Lloyd et al., 2018).

Anxiety & Depression

Children who experience anxiety, depression, trauma, and other psychosocial issues are often distracted, have difficulty concentrating, and struggle to complete tasks (Barrios, 2019). These issues can lead to poor grades, absenteeism, and low graduation rates (Barrios). Students with anxiety and depression may struggle with concentration, memory, and motivation, which can interfere with their ability to learn and retain information (International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards [IBCCES], 2019).

Studies have consistently shown that children who experience psychosocial issues are at a higher risk of school failure. According to a study published in the Journal of Educational Psychology (Suldo et al., 2019), psychosocial issues, such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation, significantly increase the risk of school dropout. Specifically, students who experience depression are three times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers without depression (NIMH, 2020). The study found that students who experienced these issues were more likely to drop out of school than their peers who were not identified with such struggles. The negative impact of psychosocial issues on academic performance can also contribute to dropout risk. When students experience psychosocial issues, they may struggle with academic performance, attendance, and engagement in school activities. Over time, these issues can escalate, leading to school disengagement

and eventually dropping out (Suldo et al.). Similarly, students who experience anxiety are more likely to miss school and have lower grades (NIMH). The impact of anxiety and depression on academic performance can also be cyclical. Students who struggle academically may experience increased feelings of anxiety and depression, leading to a further decline in academic performance (NIMH).

Schools can play an important role in supporting students with mental health conditions by providing access to mental health services and resources, creating a supportive and inclusive school environment, and promoting mental health literacy among staff and students (Altermann & Boyce, 2019). It is essential for teachers to recognize the impact of psychosocial issues on academic performance and create a supportive classroom environment that promotes overall success. Teachers can support students by providing accommodations and modifications, such as extended time on tests, frequent breaks, makeups, a classroom calm-down area, and access to mental health resources. Additionally, teachers can help students develop coping skills to manage their psychosocial issues and build resiliency. Teaching students stress management techniques, problem-solving skills, and healthy coping mechanisms can help them manage their psychosocial issues and improve their academic performance (Sontag et al., 2020).

Attention & Behavioral Issues

Behavioral and attention issues can have significant impacts on academic performance, as they can interfere with a student's ability to learn, participate in class, and build positive relationships with teachers and peers (Liu et al., 2020). Examples of behavioral issues include disruptive behavior, noncompliance with rules, and aggression toward others (Erwin, 2018). Research has consistently shown that behavioral issues are associated with lower academic achievement, higher rates of absenteeism, and a greater likelihood of dropping out of school (Erwin). Students with behavioral issues may struggle with attention and

concentration, which can also impact their ability to learn and retain information. Additionally, they may struggle to follow instructions and complete assignments, leading to poor grades and a lack of academic progress.

It is important to note that behavioral issues are often the result of underlying emotional, social, or cognitive difficulties. Addressing these underlying issues is essential for promoting positive behavior and improving academic performance. Intervention strategies may include behavior modification techniques, counseling, social skills training, and academic support (Erwin, 2018).

Impact of Psychosocial Issues on Social Functioning

Psychosocial issues can also have a significant impact on students' social functioning. Social functioning refers to an individual's ability to form and maintain relationships, participate in social activities, and engage in effective communication with others (Lieberman, 2019). For example, students who experience bullying may feel isolated and excluded from their peers, leading to low self-esteem and social withdrawal (Weisner & Mock, 2020). Similarly, students with social anxiety may struggle to form positive relationships with their peers and participate in social activities, resulting in feelings of loneliness and social isolation (NIMH, 2020). Further, children who struggle with mental health issues may have difficulty regulating their emotions and behavior, which can make it challenging for them to form positive relationships with peers and adults (APA, 2019).

Depression & Anxiety

Anxiety and depression are two common psychosocial issues that can have negative impacts on an individual's social functioning. Research has consistently shown that anxiety and depression are associated with impaired social functioning (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). Individuals with anxiety or depression may experience social withdrawal, which can lead to a lack of social support and feelings of isolation. They may also have difficulty initiating and maintaining

conversations, which can make it challenging to form and maintain relationships. Additionally, anxiety and depression can impact an individual's ability to engage in social activities and enjoy free time, further contributing to social isolation and impaired functioning (WHO). Anxiety and depression can impact an individual's self-esteem and self-worth, which can further contribute to impaired social functioning. Individuals with anxiety or depression may engage in negative self-talk and have low self-confidence, which can make it challenging to participate in social situations and form positive relationships with others (WHO).

Attention & Behavioral Issues

Children and adolescents with behavioral and attention issues may have difficulty following social norms and rules, which can lead to social isolation and conflict with peers (Tucker et al., 2019). They may also struggle with communication and social cues, which can make it challenging to form and maintain friendships with peers. Additionally, behavioral and attention issues can impact an individual's ability to engage in activities, which causes further social isolation (Erwin, 2018).

Behavioral and attention issues can also impact an individual's self-esteem and self-worth, causing children and adolescents with these issues to focus on their deficits (Erwin, 2018). Students with behavioral issues often find it difficult to form positive relationships with teachers and peers, which can lead to withdrawal and feelings of alienation. They may also struggle with emotional regulation and impulse control, which can lead to further behavior problems and conflict with others (Erwin).

It is important to note that behavioral and attention issues are treatable conditions, and early intervention can lead to improved social functioning. In addition to various interventions and behavioral therapy, social skills training and participation in communal activities can help children and adolescents with these

issues improve their social functioning and build positive relationships with peers (Hoover & Bostic, 2020).

Trauma

Students who experience trauma or abuse may have difficulty forming trusting relationships with their peers and teachers, leading to social withdrawal and difficulty participating in group activities (Miller, 2023). Individuals who have experienced trauma may have difficulty trusting others, which can lead to isolation. They may also have difficulty regulating their emotions, which may cause conflict with peers and hinder their ability to form and maintain relationships. Trauma can also impact an individual's self-esteem and self-worth, which can further contribute to impaired social functioning and withdrawal. The negative self-talk and low self-confidence that trauma survivors may experience can make it challenging to engage in social situations (Miller).

Teachers can promote social skills development by providing opportunities for peer interaction, group activities, and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs. Additionally, teachers can provide support and intervention for students experiencing social difficulties. Peer mediation programs, conflict resolution training, and social skills groups can help students develop the skills necessary to navigate social interactions and build positive relationships with their peers.

Section 2 Conclusion

Psychosocial issues and trauma can have a major impact on the development, mental health, social functioning, and academic performance of school-age youth. Trauma can disrupt key brain areas responsible for executive functioning, emotional regulation, and memory processing, leading to mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychosocial issues like anxiety and depression can significantly affect academic performance, leading to low grades, absenteeism, and a higher risk of dropping

out. As such, it is essential for educators to be aware of these impacts and provide appropriate support and resources to help students cope and recover from traumatic experiences and psychosocial issues. By creating a supportive and inclusive school environment and promoting mental health literacy, teachers can help ensure that school-age youth receive the care they need to succeed academically and emotionally.

Section 2 Key Terms

Amygdala - Region of the brain primarily associated with emotional processes

Hippocampus - A complex brain structure embedded deep into temporal lobe, which has a major role in learning and memory

Prefrontal Cortex - Part of the brain that plays a role in the regulation of complex cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning

Resilience - The capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties

Social Functioning - Refers to an individual's ability to form and maintain relationships, participate in social activities, and engage in effective communication with others

Section 2 Discussion Questions

1. How can teachers create a safe and supportive learning environment that takes into account the unique needs of students who have experienced trauma?
2. What role can schools play in addressing the impacts of psychosocial issues on academic performance, and what resources and support should be provided to students and teachers?

3. How can teachers work collaboratively with mental health professionals to support students with trauma and psychosocial issues, and what are some effective models of collaboration between educators and mental health providers?

4. What are some effective coping skills and techniques that you have used in your life or with your students that can be taught to students who are experiencing attention and behavioral issues? How can your school support these students in managing their behavior and improving their academic performance?

Section 2 Activities

1. Develop a plan to promote mental health literacy among students. This can include activities such as mindfulness exercises, informational videos about mental health conditions, discussions about mental health, and guest speakers who can share their experiences with mental health.

2. Create a list of accommodations and modifications that can support students who experience psychosocial issues, such as anxiety, depression, or trauma. This can include things like providing extra time on tests, offering alternative assignments, or creating a quiet space for students to take a break. The list should be realistic and reflect changes you can really make in your own classroom.

3. Create a student-led mental health awareness campaign for your school. This could include organizing events, creating posters or videos, or starting a social media campaign to raise awareness about mental health and reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness.

Section 3: Supporting Students with Psychosocial Issues

Once educators have recognized the signs and symptoms of psychosocial issues in students, they must take steps to support them effectively. This section will provide an overview of strategies that educators can use to create a supportive environment for students with psychosocial issues.

Strategies for Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment

Creating a safe and supportive environment is essential for students with psychosocial issues. Some strategies that educators can use to create such an environment include encouraging open communication, establishing clear boundaries, providing opportunities for social support, following the Platinum Rule, building relationships and trust, promoting a positive classroom culture, and providing a structured environment.

Encouraging Open Communication

Creating an environment where students feel comfortable talking about their thoughts and feelings can help them feel supported and understood. Open communication creates a safe environment for students by promoting trust, validation, and understanding. According to a study by Decker et al. (2019), open communication can help students feel heard, understood, and supported, which in turn can lead to increased feelings of safety and security in the classroom. Additionally, open communication can promote positive social-emotional development and can help reduce the negative impact of stressors, such as trauma, on students (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2018). Furthermore, open communication can foster a sense of community and belonging among students, which is important for their overall well-being and academic success (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2018). When students feel connected to their peers and teachers, they

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are more likely to engage in the learning process, seek help when needed, and develop positive self-esteem and confidence (Crosnoe & Johnson).

In order to create a safe environment for students through open communication, educators can use active listening skills, encourage open-ended questions and discussion, validate students' experiences and feelings, and demonstrate empathy (Decker et al., 2019). They can also create opportunities for peer-to-peer communication and collaboration, which can further promote a sense of community and belonging (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2018).

Establishing Clear Boundaries

Establishing clear boundaries can help students with psychosocial issues feel safe and secure. Boundaries help students understand what is expected of them and what is not acceptable behavior in the classroom. This, in turn, helps to promote a sense of safety and predictability, allowing students to focus on learning and building positive relationships with their peers and teachers (Reyes et al., 2019). Research has shown that clear and consistent boundaries in the classroom can lead to improved academic performance, reduced disruptive behavior, and increased student engagement (Reyes et al.). In addition, boundaries can help to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts, promoting a sense of fairness and equity in the classroom. When boundaries are not clearly established, students may feel unsure of what is expected of them and may engage in disruptive or disrespectful behavior as a result (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2018).

Clear boundaries can help students develop self-regulation skills and improve their overall social-emotional development. By establishing boundaries, teachers provide students with a framework for appropriate behavior, allowing them to develop self-control and decision-making skills (Reyes et al., 2019). This can lead to improved self-esteem and confidence, which can in turn contribute to a positive classroom environment. Educators should clearly communicate

expectations and consequences for behavior and consistently enforce them. Educators should also be consistent with their mood, tone, and responses to students. Basically, students should know what to expect from their teachers.

Teachers can establish clear boundaries with students by doing the following:

- Set clear expectations: Establishing clear expectations and guidelines for student behavior and academic performance can help create boundaries and provide structure in the classroom. Research suggests that clear expectations can improve student behavior and academic performance (Gates et al., 2020).
- Consistent enforcement: Teachers should consistently enforce rules and consequences to maintain boundaries and promote a sense of fairness in the classroom. Inconsistencies in enforcement can lead to confusion and undermine the teacher's authority (McDougall & Flatley, 2021).
- Use positive reinforcement: Praising students for good behavior and performance can reinforce boundaries and encourage positive behavior. Studies show that positive reinforcement can improve student behavior and motivation (Fontana & Fernández-Castillo, 2019).
- Encourage communication: Teachers should encourage open communication with their students to establish mutual respect and understanding. Encouraging students to ask questions and share their thoughts and feelings can help prevent boundary violations and promote a safe and positive classroom environment (Cruz et al., 2019).
- Address boundary violations: Teachers should promptly address any boundary violations and use appropriate consequences when necessary. Ignoring or minimizing boundary violations can send mixed messages and erode the teacher's authority (Gates et al., 2020).

Providing Opportunities For Social Support

Providing opportunities for social support, such as peer support groups or mentoring programs, can help students feel connected to others and reduce feelings of isolation. Opportunities for social support enhances a student's sense of belonging, reduces stress, and improves overall mental health. A study by Yang and colleagues (2019) found that social support provided by peers and teachers was positively associated with the sense of belonging of high school students. This sense of belonging was found to be a key factor in creating a safe school environment for students. Social support from teachers and peers is also a protective factor against stress and anxiety in middle school students; studies show social support as an important coping mechanism to reduce stress and enhance well-being (Mccoy et al., 2020).

Following the Platinum Rule

People typically refer to the Golden Rule: Treat others how you want to be treated. However, to truly display empathy, teachers must instead follow the Platinum Rule: "Treat others the way they want — and need — to be treated" (Morin, 2019). The Platinum Rule puts the focus on understanding what students need from their teachers, rather than focusing on what we think they need (Morin).

Building Relationships and Trust

Building strong relationships with students is critical to creating a safe and supportive environment. Educators should take time to get to know their students and show an interest in their lives. This can involve asking about students' interests and hobbies, attending extracurricular activities, or simply taking time to chat with students before or after class. When students feel that their teachers care about them as individuals, they are more likely to feel supported and motivated to succeed.

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In addition to building relationships, educators can also build trust with students by being consistent and reliable. This means following through on promises, being transparent about expectations, and being available to students when they need support. By demonstrating consistency and reliability, educators can help students feel safe and secure.

Promoting a Positive Classroom Culture

Creating a positive classroom culture can help students with psychosocial issues feel valued and included. This can involve promoting positive behavior through praise and recognition, encouraging collaboration and teamwork, and creating a sense of community in the classroom. When students feel that they are part of a supportive community, they are more likely to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with their peers and teachers. "A sense of belonging at school means feeling a sense of acceptance, respect, inclusion and support in a learning environment" (Bowen, 2021). Moreover, when students feel a sense of belonging, they are more engaged with their work, display more on-task behavior, and more likely to choose to be in the school environment (Bowen). On the other hand, students who don't feel a sense of belonging have greater difficulty focusing on cognitive tasks because their brains are experiencing emotional difficulties; this can lead to frequent nurse visits, truancy, and an overall avoidance of the school environment (Bowen).

Educators can promote a positive classroom culture by modeling positive behavior themselves. This means being respectful, compassionate, and empathetic towards students, and demonstrating a willingness to learn from mistakes (Bowen). When educators model positive behavior, they create a safe and supportive environment that encourages students to do the same.

Providing a Structured and Predictable Environment

Students with psychosocial issues may feel overwhelmed or anxious in unstructured or unpredictable environments. Providing a structured and predictable environment can help students feel more comfortable and secure (Huang & Weisman, 2019). This can involve establishing clear routines and expectations for behavior, and providing clear instructions for assignments and activities. In addition, educators can help students feel more comfortable by providing a physical environment that is welcoming and comfortable. Overall, creating a safe and supportive environment requires educators to be intentional and thoughtful in their approach to teaching. By building relationships, promoting positive behavior, and providing structure and predictability, educators can create a classroom environment that supports the needs of all students.

Effective Communication Strategies for Supporting Students

Communication is key when it comes to building positive relationships with students, and making them feel safe and supported. Effective communication strategies are essential for supporting all students, but particularly those with psychosocial issues. Some effective communication strategies that educators can use include:

- Using non-judgmental language: Using non-judgmental language can help students feel heard and respected. Educators should avoid using stigmatizing language or making assumptions about students' experiences (Alvidrez, S., & O'Brien, 2019).
- Encouraging self-expression: Encouraging students to express themselves can help them process their feelings and develop coping strategies. Educators can provide opportunities for self-expression through activities such as journaling or art projects.

- Collaborating with other professionals: Collaborating with school counselors, psychologists, or social workers can help educators provide comprehensive support to students with psychosocial issues. Educators should communicate with these professionals regularly to ensure that students receive the support they need.
- Active listening: Active listening involves giving students your full attention and seeking to understand their perspective. This can involve paraphrasing what the student has said to demonstrate understanding and clarifying any misunderstandings (Sudderth, 2022).
- Nonverbal communication: Nonverbal communication, such as body language and tone of voice, can communicate a great deal to students. It's important for educators to be aware of their nonverbal communication and use it to convey empathy and support (Kim et al., 2019).
- Clear and concise language: Using clear and concise language can help students understand expectations and reduce confusion or frustration. Avoiding jargon or technical language can also be helpful for students who may struggle with processing language, as well as English Language Learners (ELLs).
- Collaborative problem-solving: When students experience challenges, collaborative problem-solving can help them feel supported and empowered. This involves working together to identify solutions and develop a plan of action (White et al., 2018).
- Provide regular feedback: Effective communication can also involve providing regular feedback to students. This can help students understand their progress and identify areas for improvement. Providing specific, actionable feedback can be particularly helpful for students with

psychosocial issues who may struggle with self-esteem and self-confidence (Hoover et al., 2018).

In addition, it's important for educators to be aware of their own biases and assumptions when communicating with students. Cultivating a mindset of empathy and understanding can help to build positive relationships with students and create a supportive classroom environment.

Supportive Teaching Strategies

Strategies that support the diverse learning needs of students with psychosocial issues require educators to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to teaching. By using differentiated instruction, SEL, and collaborative learning, teachers can create a learning environment that supports all learners.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a teaching strategy that involves adapting instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of students (Tomlinson & Moon, 2020). For students with psychosocial issues, differentiated instruction can involve providing accommodations and modifications that support their emotional and behavioral needs; this might include providing additional time for assignments or assessments, allowing students to take breaks when needed, or providing visual aids to support learning (Solomon et al., 2018a). Differentiated instruction can also involve providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in varied ways. For example, some students may struggle with written assignments but excel at oral presentations. By providing a range of options for demonstrating learning, educators can support the diverse needs of their students and create an inclusive classroom environment.

Differentiated instruction is effective because it acknowledges that not all students have the same learning styles and needs, and it provides individualized

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instruction to support their learning (Solomon et al., 2018b). This helps to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed. While differentiated instruction is necessary for students with diverse learning needs to stay engaged, motivated, and to access the content, it can also benefit all students. Further, according to a 2019 study, differentiated instruction can also help to reduce students' anxiety and promote their emotional well-being. By providing instruction that is adapted to their needs, students may feel more comfortable and secure in the classroom (Nelson et al., 2019).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process that helps students develop the skills and attitudes necessary to manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2023). For students with psychosocial issues, SEL can be particularly important in helping them develop the attributes they need to succeed in school and in life. SEL can be integrated into daily instruction through a variety of activities and strategies, such as:

- Providing opportunities for students to practice social skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.
- Teaching self-regulation skills, such as mindfulness and relaxation techniques.
- Encouraging students to reflect on their emotions and develop a positive self-concept.
- Providing opportunities for students to engage in service learning and community service projects, which can help build empathy and social awareness. (Durlak et al., 2018)

By integrating SEL into daily instruction, educators can create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that promotes the social and emotional well-being of all students.

SEL instruction has been shown to be particularly beneficial for students with psychosocial issues, as it can help them to develop skills and strategies for managing their emotions and behaviors, building positive relationships, and making responsible decisions (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2019; Zins et al., 2020). For example, a 2019 study found that students with emotional and behavioral disorders who participated in an SEL program showed significant improvements in social skills, self-esteem, and academic performance (Fernández-Batanero et al). Another study from 2020 found that SEL interventions can improve mental health outcomes for students with psychosocial issues, such as reducing anxiety and depression symptoms (Zins et al.).

SEL instruction can help students with psychosocial issues feel more connected and supported in the school community, which can in turn improve their overall well-being (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2019; Zins et al., 2020). By providing opportunities for students to practice social skills, develop positive relationships with peers and adults, and engage in service learning and community service projects, SEL instruction can help students to build a sense of belonging and purpose, which is particularly important for students who may struggle with social isolation or disconnection (Zins et al.).

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is a teaching strategy that involves students working together to achieve a common goal. Collaborative learning has been found to be beneficial for students with psychosocial issues in several ways. One of the main benefits is that it can help these students build positive relationships with peers, which is important for their social and emotional development (Gennuso &

Blaschke, 2021). Collaborative learning can also support the development of social skills, such as communication and problem-solving, as students work together to achieve a common goal (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). This type of learning can involve a range of activities, such as group projects, peer mentoring, and cooperative learning activities (Baird & Bridges, 2021). By working together, students can learn from each other and develop the skills they need to succeed in school and in life.

Collaborative learning can also provide students with opportunities to receive support and feedback from their peers, which can be particularly helpful for students who may struggle with self-esteem or confidence issues. For example, Gennuso and Blaschke (2021) found that collaborative learning activities that involved peer mentoring helped to improve the self-efficacy and academic performance of students with learning disabilities. Collaborative learning can also provide a sense of belonging and inclusion for students who may feel isolated or disconnected from the school community (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021).

In addition, collaborative learning can help students develop important skills for success in their future careers, such as teamwork and collaboration. By working together in a collaborative learning environment, students can learn to value and appreciate the contributions of others, which can help them to work effectively in a team setting in their future professions (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). Overall, collaborative learning is a beneficial teaching strategy for students with psychosocial issues, as it can support their social and emotional development, provide opportunities for peer support and feedback, and help them to develop important skills for success in school and beyond.

Section 3 Conclusion

Creating a safe and supportive environment for students with psychosocial issues is essential for their well-being, social-functioning and academic success. Establishing clear boundaries and open communication, providing opportunities

for social support, building relationships and trust, promoting a positive classroom culture, and providing a structured environment are some of the strategies that educators can use to create such an environment. Furthermore, using teaching strategies that promote fairness and equity, such as differentiated instruction, SEL, and collaborative learning helps to build a safe and supportive environment where all students can thrive.

Section 3 Key Terms

Active Listening - A communication technique where the listener focuses fully on what the speaker is saying, and shows understanding and engagement by using various verbal and nonverbal cues

Collaborative Learning - A teaching strategy that involves students working together to achieve a common goal

Differentiated Instruction - A teaching strategy that involves adapting instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of students

Empathy - The ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) - A process that helps students develop the skills and attitudes necessary to manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions

Section 3 Discussion Questions

1. How can teachers encourage open communication with students who may be hesitant to share personal experiences in a classroom setting? How do you personally break down barriers with students to establish trust?
2. What are some effective ways for educators to establish clear boundaries while also maintaining a supportive and compassionate learning environment for students with psychosocial issues?

a. Discuss a time that you were forced to establish clear boundaries in school.

b. How did it make you and the student/s feel?

c. Do you feel like you successfully established the boundary, while maintaining empathy and compassion?

3. In what ways can teachers provide opportunities for social support for students with psychosocial issues, both in and out of the classroom? What are some specific strategies that you have used in your practice?

Section 3 Activities

1. Classroom observation: With a participating colleague, observe each other's classrooms for a class period or two, and then provide feedback for one another on how well the strategies discussed in this section are being implemented. Alternatively, set up a camera to record yourself during one of your class periods. Watch it back and assess yourself on how well you are implementing the strategies.

2. Research classroom management strategies that are effective in creating a safe and supportive environment for students, with a focus on students with psychosocial issues.

    a. Make a list of these strategies and keep them for reference.

    b. Choose 1-2 strategies to try to implement in your classroom.

    c. Reflect on what works and what does not work.

3. Read the following scenario and then answer the questions: Bryson is a 10-year-old student who has a history of ADHD and anxiety disorder. Bryson has difficulty focusing on classwork and often becomes easily frustrated

with academic tasks. He struggles with transitions between activities and can become disruptive in the classroom. Bryson's social skills are also underdeveloped, and he struggles to form positive relationships with his peers.

a. Develop strategies to create a safe and supportive learning environment for Bryson.

b. Evaluate your strategies to see if you can implement them in your own classroom.

Conclusion

The psychosocial challenges that children and adolescents face in the school system can have a profound impact on their lives. The prevalence of mental health disorders among school-aged children is a significant concern, and educators must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to support their students in navigating these issues. This course provides valuable insights into the most common psychosocial issues facing young people today, the academic and learning challenges that can result, and the critical role that educators and schools can play in providing support. By understanding these issues and providing effective support, educators can help students achieve their full potential and succeed academically, emotionally, and socially.

Case Study

Ms. Maple is a middle school teacher who has noticed that students in her school are facing a range of psychological and social issues that are impacting their academic performance and well-being. She has observed students experiencing stress, anxiety, bullying, social isolation, and academic difficulties. Ms. Maple

recognizes that she needs to understand these issues better to support her students effectively. Further, Ms. Maple wants to help her school's administration to establish school wide initiatives to address the issues, but she does not know where to start. She decides to pursue professional development in the area of social and emotional support for all students, with specific focus on assisting those with psychosocial struggles.

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