



Psykisk helse
1999-2008

Look at me in school

A booklet of ideas about how
you can involve yourself in
mental health work in a school
environment



Sosial- og helsedirektoratet



Utdanningsdirektoratet



MENTAL HELSE

To the teacher

Mental health affects us all. Good mental health is important for our well-being, and the foundation for mental health is laid from the very first year of our lives.

World Mental Health Day on October 10th is part of an international effort to provide information and achieve openness about mental health. The initiative was taken in 1992 by the World Federation for Mental Health and the World Health Organisation (WHO). In Norway, Mental Helse is commissioned by the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs to co-ordinate this venture.

Focus this year is on children, the family, and society. The majority of children in Norway have a good and well-balanced life. Nonetheless, there are those less fortunate, and it is vital that they receive help at the earliest possible stage. All children have the right to be visible in society and to receive the care and attention they need. Positive attention from others bolsters and reinforces a child's feeling of self-esteem.

The most important factors are:

- *To reinforce the child's self-esteem and establish the foundations of a good environment for the child to grow up in*
- *To identify children with problems and do something about it*

Many people amongst us can contribute to children being more visible. Parents, kindergarten staff, and schoolteachers all see children every day. The critical thing is to know where you can go to ask for help if you are worried or believe that a child may need extra attention and following up.

It is our hope that this event will inspire the kindergartens and infant schools to place mental health firmly on the agenda, and help to focus on the assistance and treatments that are available.

On World Mental Health Day, health centres, kindergartens, schools, family centres and municipal care units can all contribute by spotlighting health and prevention efforts that are being done to hinder children developing problems.

Will you join us in celebrating World Mental Health Day?

In this booklet you will find:

- Suggestions for how the school can contribute to celebrating the day
- Proposals for activities and tasks about mental health
- Who can help?





Collage

The pupils make a collage that represents their understanding of the various aspects of the term «mental health».

Ask the children to bring three things with them from home: One item that they associate with feeling good, one item they associate with a problem or that symbolises something difficult, and one item they associate with hope. These can be everything from pictures, a newspaper, or magazine cutting to bottle top or a concert ticket – tell them to let their imaginations run free. The only rule is that the items must be suitable to form part of the collage, not too large or too heavy. The pupils should be allowed to design the collage themselves, but should remember that because the items they take with them will be glued in place, they shouldn't bring things that they would miss or want to keep.

You will need a large sheet of stiff paper or cardboard, glue to fix the items in place,

and a pair of scissors to cut the paper or items if necessary. It's important that the teacher encourages the pupils to take their time in deciding which items they want to bring with them – and why.

Divide the class into groups. Place the materials – cardboard, paper rolls, string, staples or similar, glue, scissors, and so forth on a table and ask the pupils to find the items they took with them. The pupils will then proceed to make one collage per group. Each group then presents its collage, and the individual pupils tell the class which items they took with them and why.

This task can be adapted to suit the age and school year of the children. In the case of the youngest pupils, for example, you can limit the task to clippings from magazines, where they can be asked to find pictures of people with various facial expressions.

Give a compliment!

Each pupil shall find something positive to say about his/her classmates. This task is an exercise in positive thinking and at the same time providing a basis for the discussion that follows: How does positive thinking about others affect one's own mental health?

The task is used to initiate a thought process. It is therefore important that the teacher say nothing about the discussion's goal. The pupils do not write their names on their papers.

The task

Ask the pupils to write down something positive about all their classmates. They can start with themselves. A single sentence or statement on each fellow pupil is sufficient. The results are not read out, but there is a general discussion in the class.

Discuss: Was it difficult to find something positive to write about all your classmates? Would it have been easier if you had been asked to write something negative? Why? What happens if we say something positive

about another person? How does this affect their self-esteem? How can being positive in your relationships with others affect their mental health? Can it have a positive effect on your own self-esteem?

A useful tip for teachers in connection with the task: start with an "idea brainstorming" on synonyms/different ways of expressing compliments. The younger the child, the more restricted his or her vocabulary will normally be in this area. It's also a good idea to start with an explanation of the term mental health, for example:

«When we talk about mental health, we mean our thoughts, emotions and feelings. When we feel good in our minds, we are at ease and happy with ourselves and those around us. Good mental health also means being able to react and show our feelings about things that are pleasant or difficult. Everyone has periods in his or her lives that are difficult, but these normally pass in the course of time. If this doesn't happen, it's important to ask for help and advice.»



«Secret friend»

The pupils can be allocated the task of paying special attention to one of their classmates without revealing who this is. They have a secret friend.



Mental health in schools

The national programme «Mental Health in Schools» offers training programmes for senior school and college pupils and students, as well as for teachers and health personnel.

All schools nationwide will have received an invitation to participate in the programme by 2008. Mental health in schools is designed to provide the pupils/students with an insight into, and knowledge about, how they can look after their own mental health, how they can support each other, and where they can get help. Teachers and health personnel receive training in mental health, and how to conduct themselves in relating with pupils/students with mental health problems.

It is vital that children and adolescents let someone know and ask for help, if they have problems that make it difficult for them to function well in their day-to-day lives. One objective is to better equip the pupils and students to talk about and relate to their own feelings and thoughts, in order to be able to differentiate between the norm and what they need help with. Normal feelings and reactions can become emotional problems, like feelings arising in the heart or caused by anxiety before an exam, while help should be sought for more serious problems, like depression and anxiety.

Handling problems at an early stage can prevent them from developing into more serious problems later.

Books about feelings

When a child has had a difficult emotional experience, for example, when parents divorce or the family pet dies, books can often be a good starting point for discussion about the thoughts and feelings that arise. There are many good children's books on feelings that deal with themes such as sorrow, anger, fear, envy, being different, divorce, lack of care, and suicide.



Who can help?

When a child has problems, it is necessary for a number of people to co-operate in providing help. If you have a suspicion that there is something wrong, or if you are unsure and need advice from someone with expertise in the field of mental health, it is important that you contact the relevant body.

The school health service

The school health service is a mandatory service supplied by the local authority and is available to all pupils and students in the mandatory and higher-educational school systems. Nurses, school physicians, and physiotherapists form the basic staffing of this service. It is these professionals, in co-operation with the other branches of the service apparatus, who will contribute with health information to pupils and students, teachers, and parents and guardians. The school health service is an important arena for creating security, being the safety net that catches children and adolescents that are in need of help and guidance, and as a tool for preventing and limiting even more debilitating mental health problems.

Health nurse/family physician

If you are worried about a child's development or general health, including mental health, you can advise the pupil/student to talk to the school nurse, or advise the pupil/student and parents to consult with the family physician.

Barne- og ungdomspsykiatrisk poliklinikk (BUP)

The Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic (BUP in Norwegian) can offer help in diagnosing and treating a number of mental health problems together with the family. BUP can also provide advice if you need help in addressing difficult or traumatic incidents, or matters of serious concern to the child or family. Your family physician will help the family or child with a referral to BUP.



Sosial- og helsedirektoratet



Utdanningsdirektoratet

