

Ten Best Practices for Schools

Schools play a critical role in helping students diagnosed with mental illnesses reach their full academic and functional potential. The academic performance and behavioral functioning of students significantly improves when their mental health needs are effectively addressed. NAMI calls on schools to adopt the following ten best practices:

1. Train teachers and staff on the early warning signs of mental illnesses and how to effectively communicate with families about mental health related concerns. To learn more about NAMI's *Parents and Teachers as Allies* publication and in-service education program, visit www.nami.org/caac.
2. Train school professionals in effective and research-based teaching methods and behavioral interventions, including positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS – as described at www.pbis.org).
3. Educate the entire school community about mental illnesses, including providing age-appropriate information about these conditions in the health curriculum, to help ensure a broader awareness about mental illnesses and to reduce stigma.
4. Develop and implement a plan to reduce the unacceptably high dropout and failure rates of students with mental illnesses. This includes providing a comprehensive functional behavioral assessment for students that need it and implementing effective classroom interventions. Schools cannot do this alone. NAMI stands ready to call on other community leaders to work to reduce school dropout and failure rates for these students.
5. Provide research-based and effective school-based mental health services and develop an effective link to the community mental health system for students with more intensive mental health service needs.
6. Develop effective partnerships with families that recognize the value of their input about how a student's illness impacts their academic work, peer relationships and interaction with others in the school community. These partnerships will recognize the importance of cultural competence.
7. Provide appropriate accommodations for students when they are needed, including a safe place to quiet down, additional time for completing home and school work, the assignment of a mentor, flexibility in the school day schedule and other individualized and appropriate accommodations. When appropriate, refer students for an evaluation for special education services.
8. Provide effective transition services and supports for students returning to school after receiving treatment away from school and for those transitioning between different school levels and/or into life in the community. Provide guidance for teachers and staff on effective supports for students returning to school after time away.
9. Develop effective anti-bullying policies so that students with mental illnesses are not targeted for bullying or singled out as bullies as a result of symptoms of their illness.
10. Develop effective crisis prevention and intervention services to help prevent and address psychiatric crises, youth suicide and related serious public health concerns.

NAMI applauds schools working to make a positive difference in the lives of students with mental illnesses!

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