








Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools: An Action Guide for School and District Leaders

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Key Indicators of Adolescent Mental Health Are Worsening

The Percentage of High School Students Who:*	2011 Total	2013 Total	2015 Total	2017 Total	2019 Total	2021 Total	Trend
Experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness	28	30	30	31	37	42	
Experienced poor mental health	–	–	–	–	–	29	–
Seriously considered attempting suicide	16	17	18	17	19	22	
Made a suicide plan	13	14	15	14	16	18	
Attempted suicide	8	8	9	7	9	10	
Were injured in a suicide attempt that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse	2	3	3	2	3	3	

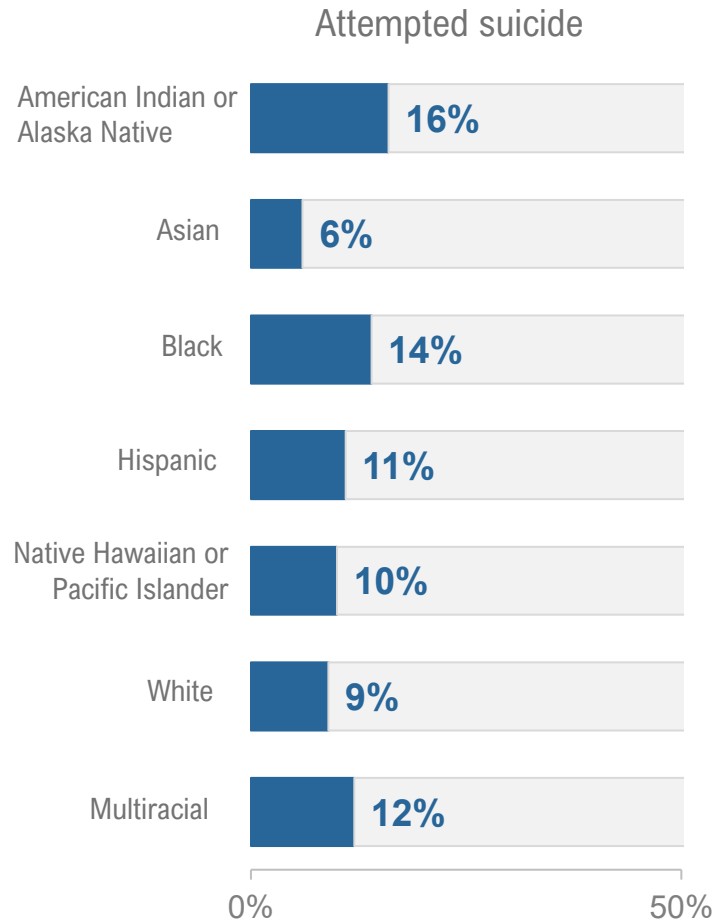
LEGEND

-  In wrong direction
-  No change
-  In right direction

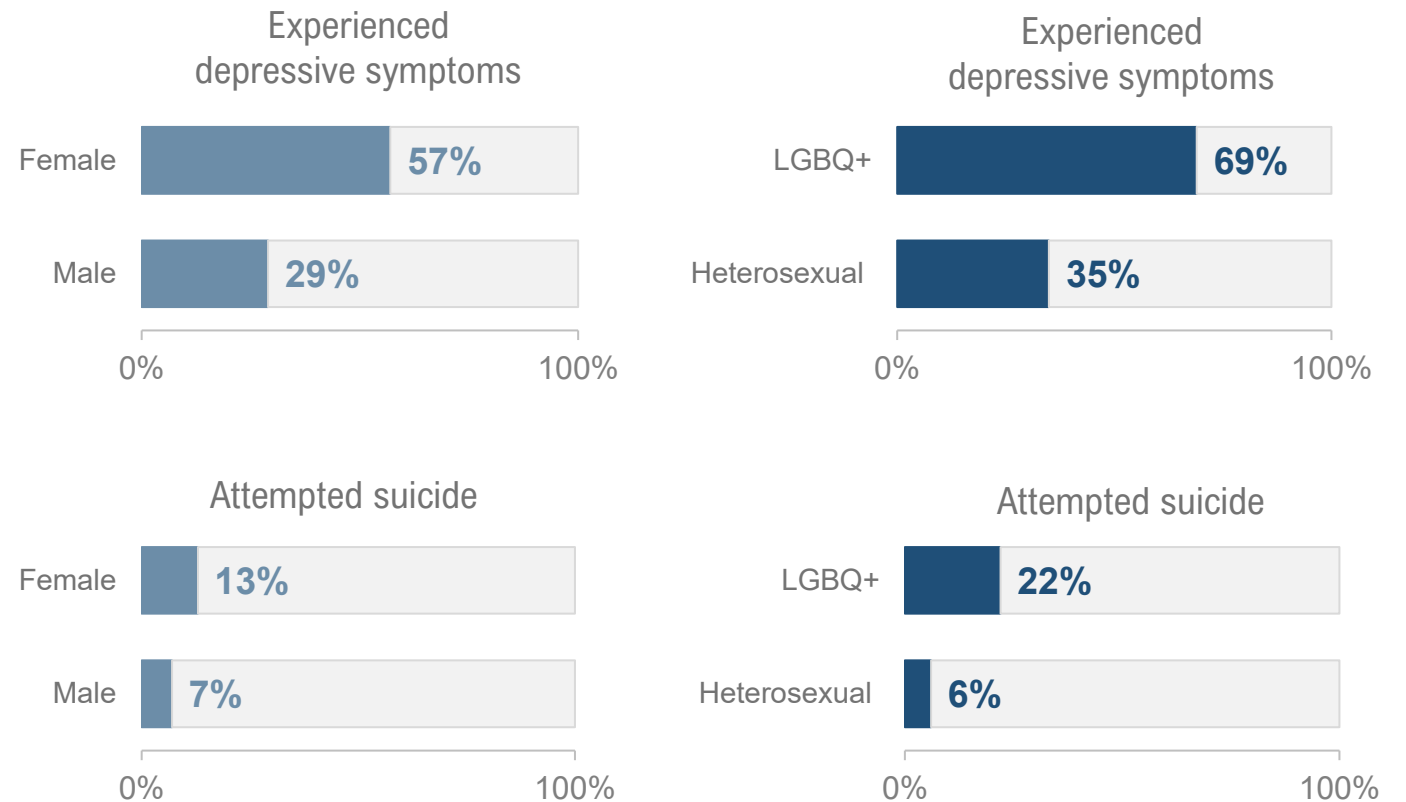
Source: National Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, 2011-2021

Mental Health and Suicidality – Data Snapshot


Black students were significantly more likely to attempt suicide



Female and LGBTQ+ students experienced more depressive symptoms and suicidality than their peers



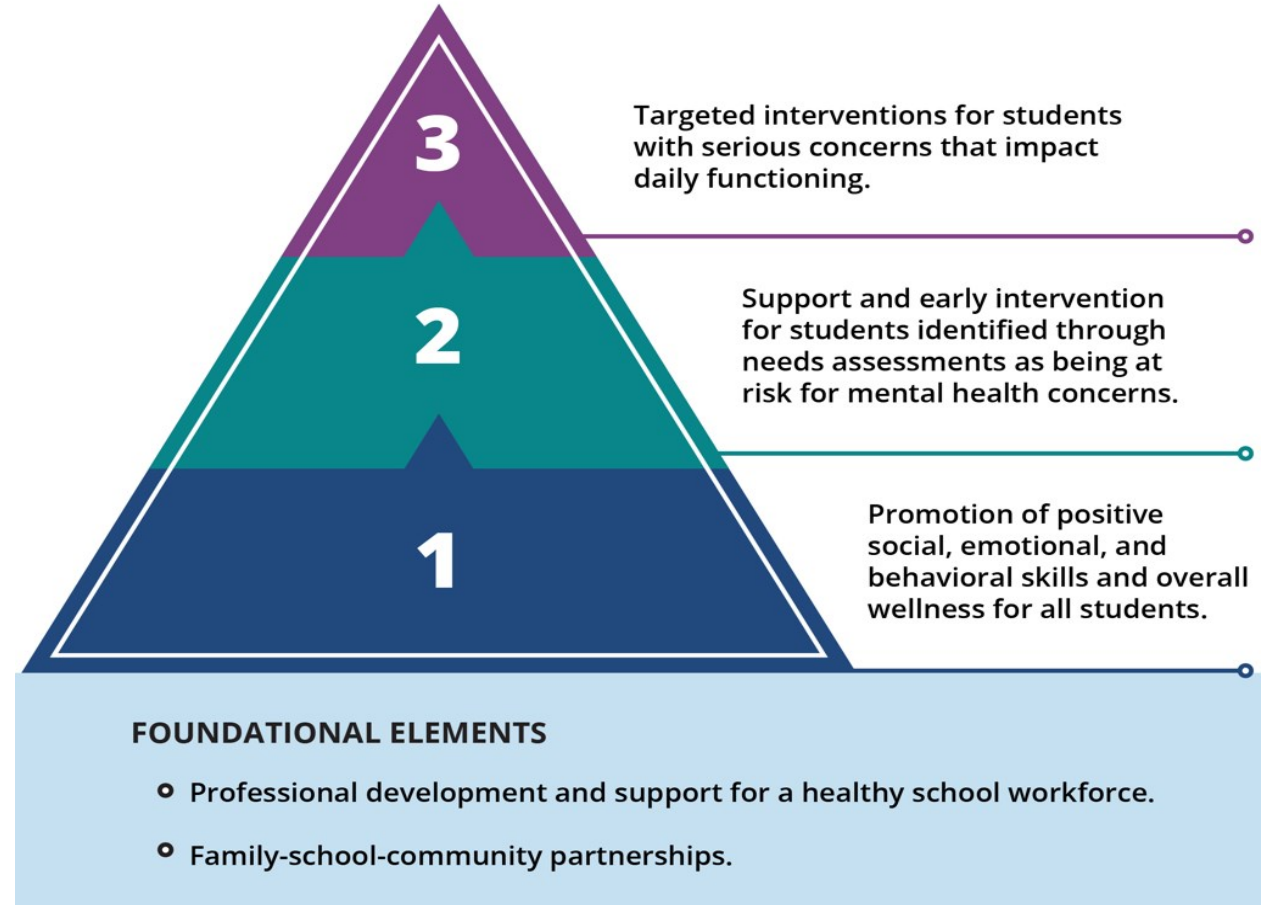
Source: National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021



Because schools **reach 95% of youth** for most of their day, school-based strategies have the **potential to improve the mental health and well-being of all young people in the U.S.**

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Action guide strategies and approaches can align with schools' existing MTSS efforts



Developing the Guide

Rigorous review of
empirical literature

Contextual evidence
from gray literature,
focus groups &
subject matter expert
feedback



Comprehensive
Action Guide
for K-12 school and
district leaders

What's Included in the Guide?

- 6 school-based strategies and supporting approaches for promoting students' mental health
 - **For each strategy**
 - Implementation tips
 - Principles for focusing on equity
 - Links to resources
 - **For each approach**
 - Evidence of impact on mental health related outcomes
 - Example programs to demonstrate approaches



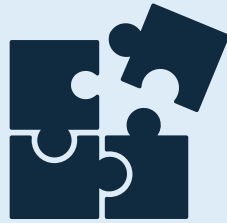
Strategies for Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools



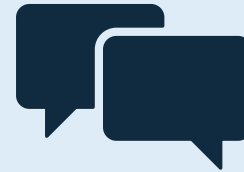
**Increase
Students'
Mental Health
Literacy**



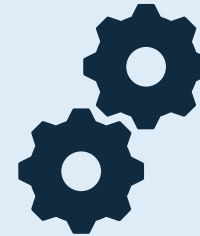
**Promote
Mindfulness**



**Promote
Social, Emotional,
and Behavioral
Learning**



**Enhance
Connectedness
Among
Students, Staff,
and Families**



**Provide
Psychosocial
Skills Training and
Cognitive
Behavioral
Interventions**



**Support Staff
Well-Being**



Increase Students' Mental Health Literacy

APPROACHES

Deliver classroom-based **mental health education** curricula

- Reduces stigma
- Improves knowledge & attitudes about mental health
- Increases likelihood of students asking for help

Implement **peer-led modeling** programs

- Improves coping skills
- Increases understanding of how to get help for mental health concerns



Increase Students' Mental Health Literacy

FOCUS ON EQUITY

- Think about ways to make mental health support more available by partnering with local, state, and regional organizations and community-based groups.
- Consider how parents, caregivers, and community members view mental health and how these views might affect students' ability to find or ask for mental health support.



**Promote
Mindfulness**

APPROACHES

Deliver classroom-based **mindfulness education**

- Increases positive coping behaviors and reduces negative coping behaviors
- Reduces anxiety and symptoms of depression

Dedicate time for students to **independently practice mindfulness**

- Decreases anxiety
- Increases resilience

Offer small group **mindfulness activities**

- Decreases stress, feelings of anxiety, and symptoms of depression



**Promote
Mindfulness**

FOCUS ON EQUITY

- Explore mindfulness practice as a way to advance equity.
- Include student voice in the development of mindfulness activities by:
 - Asking students what visualization strategies they like best
 - Offering students the opportunity to lead mindfulness exercises



**Promote
Social,
Emotional, and
Behavioral
Learning**

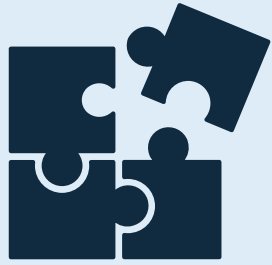
APPROACHES

Provide **classroom instruction** focused on building social skills and emotional development

- Improves mental health, well-being and resilience
- Decreases symptoms of depression and feelings of anxiety

Offer targeted education focused on **teaching social skills and emotional development**

- Decreases symptoms of depression, feelings of anxiety, and other symptoms of poor mental health



**Promote
Social,
Emotional, and
Behavioral
Learning**

FOCUS ON EQUITY

- Consider using transformative social and emotional learning to advance equity
- Consider using screening tools to support students', but examine the tools for potential bias and misuse



APPROACH

**Enhance
Connectedness
Among Students,
Staff, and Families**

Provide **relationship-building** programs

- Decreases symptoms of depression, feelings of anxiety, and other symptoms of poor mental health

Additional resource: [What Can Schools Do?: School Connectedness](#)

Additional Activities to Increase School Connectedness

Classroom Management	Service-Learning Programs	Mentoring Programs	LGBTQ+ Supportive Policies and Practices
Providing professional development on classroom management techniques, and policies and practices that support youth	Implementing school-based service-learning programs	Implementing school-based mentoring programs	Implementing policies and practices that support LGBTQ+ youth



**Enhance
Connectedness
Among Students,
Staff, and Families**

FOCUS ON EQUITY

- Strategies to build connection should focus on students more likely to be marginalized and feel disconnected in school. Examples of policies and practices include:
 - Affinity groups for students of color and LGBTQ+ students
 - Anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies that specifically protect students and staff against gender- and sexual identity-based harassment
 - Trauma-informed policies and practices that consider the impact of trauma; recognize the signs and reactions of trauma; and prevent re-traumatization of students



**Provide
Psychosocial
Skills Training
and Cognitive
Behavioral
Interventions**

APPROACHES

Promote acceptance and commitment to change

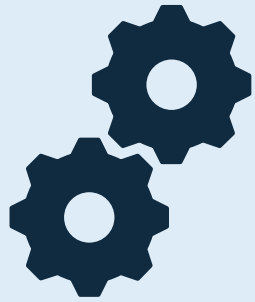
- Increases coping skills
- Decreases depression and physical symptoms of depression

Provide cognitive **behavioral interventions**

- Decreases anxiety, depression, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress

Engage students in **copng skills** training groups

- Increases coping skills
- Decreases anxiety and depression



**Provide
Psychosocial
Skills Training
and Cognitive
Behavioral
Interventions**

FOCUS ON EQUITY

- Be aware of students' fight-or-flight emotional response
- Consider and address the unique mental health needs of students who have been exposed to adverse childhood experience and trauma



APPROACHES

Support Staff Well-Being

Offer mindfulness-based **training programs**

- Improves well-being
- Decreases stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression

Provide therapeutic **resources**

- Decreases stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression



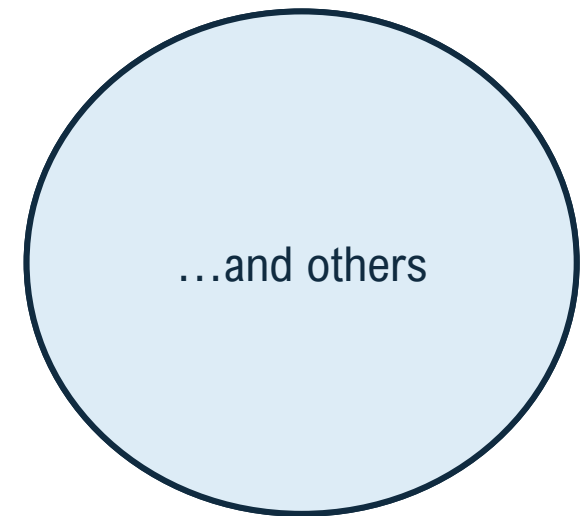
Support Staff Well-Being

FOCUS ON EQUITY

- Strategies that reduce racial discrimination and improve inclusivity among school staff are critical for promoting staff wellness. Example strategies include:
 - Offering culturally relevant mental health and well-being supports that staff can access.
 - Creating supportive environments within schools that include safe spaces for staff (e.g., affinity groups) and activities that provide social support and promote resilience.

Promising Practices

- Approaches to promote nurturing and welcoming school environments may positively impact mental health and well-being. Schools can promote nurturing and welcoming environments through:



Additional Considerations for Implementation

Supporting the Diverse Needs of Students

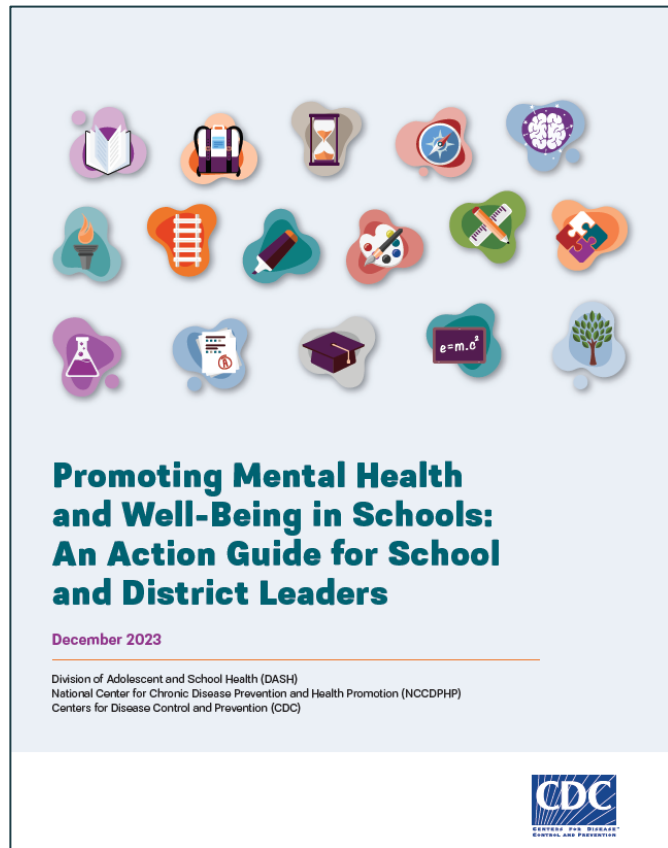
- Match programs to students' developmental needs.
- Incorporate culturally responsive information.
- Educate staff on the social, historical, and environmental inequalities that certain student groups face.
- Support and welcome students, especially those at higher risk of marginalization.
- Support school attendance by addressing factors that can contribute to absenteeism.
- Review school practices and policies to identify whether they might disadvantage specific groups of students.

Using Comprehensive Assessment Tools

- Assessment data can help schools understand and improve both student and adult competencies, behaviors, and performance and increase accountability.
- Using student data to make decisions about the supports students need is a central component of MTSS.
- Screening can also help link students to needed services.



School Mental Health Action Guide & Webpages



<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health-action-guide/index.html>

Supporting Resources



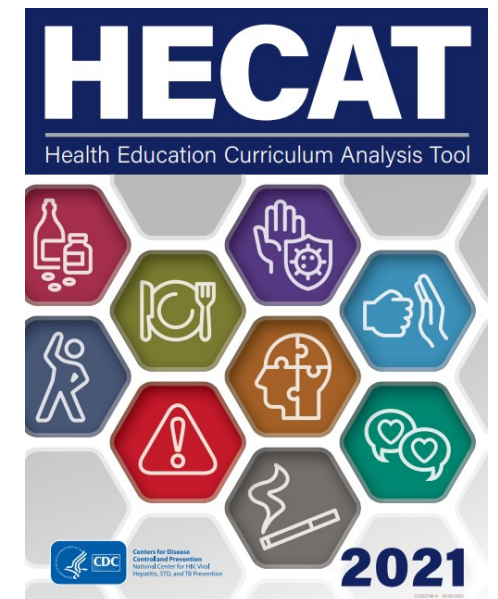
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf



**LGBTQ Inclusivity in Schools:
A Self-Assessment Tool**



https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/lgbtq_youth.htm



<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/hecat/index.htm>

Thank You

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Division of Adolescent and School Health

