



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

RESOURCE

Empowering Students to Reduce Mental Health Stigma in Schools

Mental health stigma can be a significant barrier to students seeking help and support, ultimately affecting their well-being and academic success. When school-communities reduce stigma, they create an environment where all students feel comfortable discussing their mental health needs and accessing resources.

Students have the power to lead this change, working alongside educators to normalize conversations around mental health. When students lead conversations about mental health, normalize help-seeking, and support one another, it creates an environment of acceptance, connection, and safety.

How Students Can Lead the Change

Peer to Peer Education and Support

Students are more likely to confide in peers than adults when they're struggling. Educators can help reduce stigma by supporting or facilitating peer-led programs that foster empathy, awareness, and early intervention, such as:

- [Hope Squad](#): Students are nominated by peers and trained to identify warning signs of suicide, listen without judgement, and refer peers to trusted adults (Wright-Berryman, Thompson, & Cramer, 2022).
- [Raise Your Voice Clubs \(NAMI\)](#): Student-led mental health awareness groups that reduce stigma through education, storytelling, and outreach events.
- [Sources of Strength](#): Trains diverse student leaders to promote hope, help, and strength through storytelling and school-wide messaging campaigns (Wyman et al., 2010).
- [Bring Change to Mind High School Program](#): Equips students to lead school clubs focused on ending the stigma around mental health (Goldberg, 2020).

Amplifying Student Voice

Students who feel heard are more likely to advocate for mental health. Educators can provide platforms for youth voices through:

- Assemblies and student panels on mental health.
- Classroom discussions and advisory periods.
- Opportunities for students to co-design awareness campaigns or events.
- Empathy interviews to gather student insights to inform mental health related policies and practices (DPI 2024).

Social Media and Messaging Campaigns

Encouraging students to use social media to promote mental wellness helps shift narratives. Educators can support students in developing safe, empowering campaigns during awareness months or in response to school and community needs.

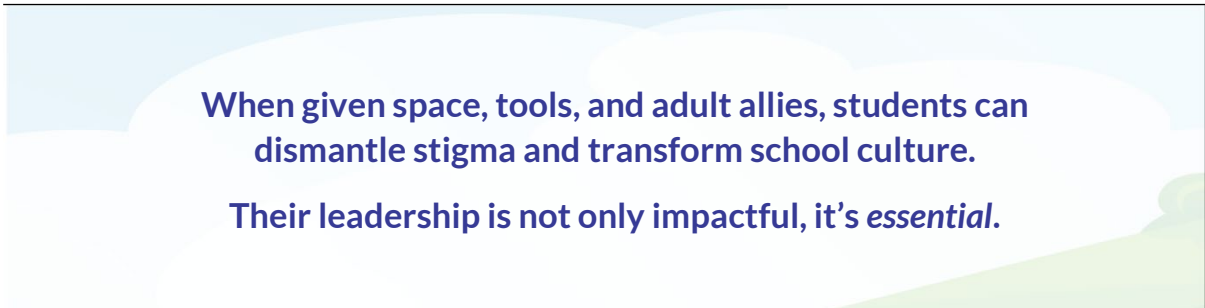
Normalize Help-Seeking Behavior

When students share personal stories and advocate for mental health support, it sends a strong message: “*You are not alone.*” Educators can support these efforts by ensuring that trusted adults are available and that students know where and how to access help.

One way to reinforce this support is by adopting [The Safe Person 7 Promises](#), a set of commitments trusted adults can make to show they are safe, approachable, and ready to listen without judgement.

Supporting Educator Readiness

Educators don’t need to be mental health experts to empower students, they just need to be open, informed, and supportive. Encourage professional learning around mental health literacy, active listening, and stigma reduction to create a responsive environment for student-led efforts.



**When given space, tools, and adult allies, students can
dismantle stigma and transform school culture.**

Their leadership is not only impactful, it’s essential.

References

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