

Trauma Sensitive Schools

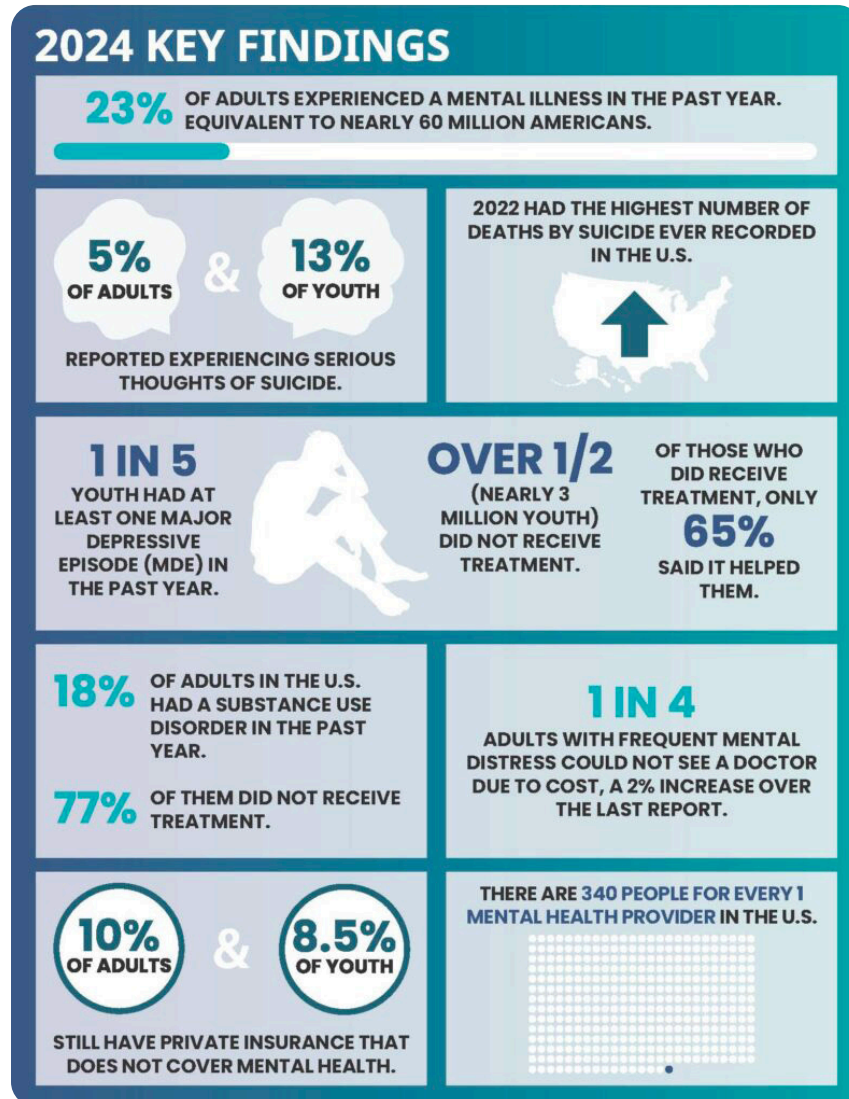
The Importance of School-Based Mental Health

Wellpoint Care Network
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A Mental Health Crisis

- In 2024, **23.4% of U.S. adults** said they had experienced a mental challenge within the past year — equivalent to over 60 million people.
- In 2024, **11.3% of U.S. youth aged 12–17** said they had experienced a major depressive episode (MDE) with severe impairment within the past year, meaning it severely impacted their functioning at work, school or home. That's a total of 2.8 million youth.



- Access to mental health care remains out of reach for millions of people in the U.S. who need it. **9.2% of adults** with a mental health challenge were uninsured in 2022 and 2023, totaling over 5 million people.
- Youth also lack proper preventive care: **28.6% of adolescents** did not have a preventive health visit in 2022 and 2023, totalling over 7 million young people in the U.S.

Photo Source: Mental Health America

Mental Health Where Students Are

The need for mental health support continues to grow. In the average-sized classroom of 25 students, it's likely **more than a quarter** will have diagnosable mental health concerns. In fact, mental health referrals have skyrocketed, growing **over 300% from 2019 to 2021**. The most prominent diagnosis seen today is anxiety and anxiety-related issues.

Toxic stress during childhood changes how the brain develops, often breaking important connections to our physical, emotional and behavioral well-being. That's why early intervention for children in schools is so important.

The Role of Schools

Schools play a vital role in connecting children, youth and families to mental health services. **School-based services** bring trained mental health professionals into the school, while **school-linked services** connect youth and families to more intensive resources in the community.

By bringing mental health services into schools, we help ensure youth and families can receive timely treatment and support, particularly in communities where mental health resources are often stretched thin. School staff — and students — can learn to identify the warning signs of an emerging mental health condition and how to connect someone to care.*

When we invest in children's mental health to make sure they can get the right care at the right time, we improve the lives of children, youth and families — and our communities.*

School is a great place to provide mental health services because the students are there for such a significant portion of the day. As educators, you play one of the most crucial roles for our children: seeing them through the first years of life, setting templates for relationships, trust building and providing regulating experiences.

*Source: NAMI

NEVAEH'S STORY

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, six-year-old Nevaeh[†] never went to preschool. When she finally started school, she experienced horrible separation anxiety. Getting to school and doing anything in school was almost impossible for her.

For Nevaeh to be comfortable and have success in the classroom, her mental health needed to be addressed before it led to further struggles and possible classroom disruptions.

Working with a therapist to address these issues is only one element of the approach. Trauma-informed teachers trained in interacting with students struggling with anxiety can help create a positive environment to foster success.

Students will not be able to reach their fullest potential if there's an underlying mental health issue complicating relationships, interactions, attention and ability to focus.

Trauma Informed Care training and tools are essential elements in helping a school fulfill its ultimate goal of educating children and helping them be successful in the classroom and beyond.

[†] Name has been changed to protect child's identity.

Mental Health for the Modern Student

Many factors play a role in a student's mental health. From issues at home, violence within the communities they live, as well as an increase in violence in schools.

Additionally, social media has exacerbated bullying. The ease with which someone can spread a rumor instantly to the entire school is horrifying, and has huge impact on children. The social media persona in general: how many people liked a post, or liked an Instagram picture, or didn't, or if people have made mean comments.

All of these things have contributed to a significantly higher level of general anxiety in children. This sometimes plays out with children not being able to attend school at all or being highly sensitized to different behaviors or any kind of criticism.

The **Pew Research Center's** 2018 survey of U.S. teens determined **one in six teenagers** have experienced at least one of the following forms of abusive behavior online:

- Name-calling (**42%**)
- Spreading false rumors (**32%**)
- Receiving unsolicited, explicit images (**25%**)
- Having their activities and whereabouts tracked by someone other than a parent (**21%**)
- Receiving physical threats (**16%**)
- Having their explicit images shared without their consent (**7%**)

**Source: Pew Research Center*

KEISHA'S STORY

Keisha* was only 10 years old when her parent was arrested following an altercation with police. Because of this, and the struggle with suicidal ideation that followed, she began seeing a therapist at Wellpoint Care.

Because therapists are not in a child's school every day, sharing needs with the school staff is critical. As we already had an established and positive relationship with Keisha's school counseling team, we were able to better incorporate them into her support plan.

Keisha benefited from this synergy with daily check-ins, whether from school staff or a therapist. We were also able to share resources, regulation activities and a common trauma sensitive language to maximize their success.

In this case, the school was able to reach out to some of her teachers and coaches and say, "Keisha's really going through a tough time right now. Let's structure her day in a less stressful way. Let's focus on her mental health over anything else right now."

When a child's therapist, school counseling department and administrators are all in communication and work together, a student's mental health can greatly improve.

** Name has been changed to protect child's identity.*

What Can Schools Do?

As today's educators, support staff and school administrators, you have led an educational evolution that calls schools to be more than a place of academics, but to also foster social and emotional learning and well-being. While achievement and test scores are still key academic performance indicators, your goals now extend well beyond the classroom where you hope to create life-long learners and engaged citizens.

Creating a perspective shift for teachers and behavioral support systems for youth in learning environments is critical. A curriculum for training should include:

- Addressing challenges that can stand in the way of educational success.
- Appreciating the impact and prevalence of trauma.
- Shifting perspective by changing the question from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” and “How can I support you?”
- Providing sensory and regulation-based activities.
- Using relationship to help students create resilience.
- Helping students find their reason to be; the sense of purpose or direction.
- Teaching self-care so you can be the best educator you can be.



Funding is Available In Wisconsin

School districts in Wisconsin can apply for several funding grants to help support this work:

- Wisconsin School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program
- Get Kids Ahead Initiative
- Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education)

The Wellpoint Care Network Difference

Why Wellpoint Care?

At Wellpoint Care Network, we have an integrated mental health model. We offer multiple levels of support to have the broadest reach and highest impact on youth mental health.

Primary Interventions focus on understanding the impact of mental health on learning. You will create proactive interventions for all students with an eye toward maintaining their mental health and well-being.

Secondary Interventions are where ideas are put into action. Start with classroom observations and recommendations to support teachers in the classroom and model ways to enhance regulation and emotional awareness.

Tertiary Interventions are individual and direct services that take place in the school, which makes services more accessible and creates greater consistency. It also connects services back to the school environment.

PRIMARY 1

EARLY INTERVENTION

Universal, proactive support for all students and staff promoting total well-being

SECONDARY 2

TREATMENT & RECOVERY

Rapid response and supports via small groups, consultation and coaching

TERTIARY 3

WELLNESS & MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

Evidence-based assessment, individual and family therapy for high-needs youth

We Work with Administrators

Many schools struggle to meet the social, emotional and behavioral needs of some of their students. When teachers are faced with challenging or disruptive behaviors, too much of their time is spent on restoring order and keeping students safe. And, not enough time is spent being an educator.

This is where we can help. We have partnered with countless schools to teach teachers how to reduce difficult behaviors and to develop a school climate and culture where all kids can learn and ultimately thrive.

We Work with Teachers

Since not all students arrive ready and able to learn each day, we also teach you some less conventional ways to connect with students – regulation and mindfulness activities, like drumming and meditating, could prove much more effective than calling on a student who is agitated or tuned out. We also focus on interventions that may serve multiple students or a whole classroom.

Our Secret to Success

Over the last several years, the concept of mental health in schools has grown. At this point, many schools have been introduced to or had a trauma sensitive schools training.

At Wellpoint Care Network, we take those introductions to the next step, and help you answer the following questions.

- What do you do with that training so that it's not a one and done situation?
- How do you incorporate that into your classrooms?
- How do you incorporate that into your Individualized Education Program language or your discipline?
- How do you incorporate that into initiatives that are already in place?

Using the **Seven Essential Ingredients** framework (see sidebar), schools are guided by the core values of safety, trust, and collaboration. This approach recognizes how common trauma exposure is and helps educators respond to the often unseen challenges that affect learning.

Once operationalized across a school, school system or entire school district, Trauma Sensitive Schools professional development and consultation equips all school personnel to shape a positive, healthy school climate that supports all students and engages them in learning.



ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

Trauma Informed Care can be both a philosophy and a practice. At Wellpoint Care Network, we believe the following seven elements will help you understand how to implement it in your everyday life.

Prevalence

Exposure to adverse experiences is more common than previously known. To help people who have experienced trauma, we need to consider this fact — especially when it comes to children.

Impact

The impact of trauma can be profound, especially when it occurs during key developmental timeframes, and can contribute to difficulties later in life.

Perspective Shift

Shifting our perspective is a key to empathy and can reveal new truths about the people in our care. Change the question from, “What is wrong with you?” to “What has happened to you?” and “How can I support you?”

Regulation

Most interventions focus on the “thinking” parts of the brain. Trauma-informed interventions prioritize emotional and behavioral regulation instead.

Relationship

Strong, caring connections create resilience in children and help shield them from the effects of trauma.

Reason to Be

By ensuring a connection to family, community and culture, children can develop a healthy sense of purpose and direction.

Caregiver Capacity

If we're going to effectively work with traumatized people, we need to take care of ourselves. By identifying our limits, we can find a sustainable work/life balance.

In Summary

Wellpoint Care Network provides the care and support that children, youth and families need to heal from significant trauma.

Our experience spans decades and has included case management, youth residential treatment, family preservation and mental health services.

Through assisting people in our care on their healing journeys, we have acquired substantial direct practice experience and established a proven Trauma Informed Care practice and culture.

Part of this experience and history has been creating a particular expertise around school-based mental health.

At Wellpoint Care, we understand that school-based mental health service delivery is different from traditional outpatient settings.

Approaches to clinical licensure oversight, supervision, risk management, liability and confidentiality are just a few of the potential differences.

We have decades of experience providing mental health support in schools and community-based settings, and provide extensive professional development for our therapists, including evidence-based practices around risk assessment, treatment modalities, trauma and more.

School-based mental health can be challenging, but Wellpoint Care Network can help you build the right plan and right approach for your school, your district and your community. We'll help you move from training and education to action and impact.

That's the Wellpoint Care difference.





wellpoint
care network



**ACCEPTING
NEW
PATIENTS**

Reach out to us:

Monday-Friday | 8 a.m.-7 p.m.

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Find us online @WellpointCare

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