Red Flags Toolkit and Framework

Description
Red Flags is a framework and toolkit for mental health education. The framework builds on an understanding of the importance of mental health to overall wellbeing. It includes the entire school community: teachers, staff, students, and their families. The toolkit provides a variety of materials and strategies for implementing the framework. Red Flags is both comprehensive and easy to implement. It is flexible, inexpensive, sustainable, and regularly revised based on input and suggestions from those using it.

Objectives
1. To alert teachers, parents, and students to the fundamental importance of mental health to overall wellbeing.
2. To help teachers, parents, and students recognize the behavioral symptoms of depression and other common mental disorders.
3. To encourage appropriate intervention at the onset of symptoms.
4. To assist schools in the development of a protocol for recognizing, referring, and accommodating at-risk students.
5. To assist parents in getting help for children who may be in need of psychiatric assistance.

Red Flags Rationale
Mental health is an essential part of overall wellbeing, and is critical to a child's development and ability to learn. Like physical health, good mental health does not just happen. It needs to be taught and then fostered through the development of good mental health habits. Such habits include a healthy diet, rest, exercise, and the development of emotional intelligence, resilience, and stress management skills. Good health habits also include regular check-ups, and appropriate visits to health professionals when necessary. Research has shown that children are as vulnerable to mental disorders as the adult population, and that this vulnerability increases during adolescence and young adulthood.
While not excluding other common childhood disorders, Red Flags specifically focuses on depression because depression may be the most common and least stigmatized of the mental disorders, and its symptoms frequently overlap with the symptoms of other disorders. The objective of Red Flags is not to diagnose, but to enable early recognition of symptoms that indicate the need for evaluation by a qualified professional. Timely and appropriate intervention can literally and figuratively save a youngster's life.

Materials
Red Flags recognizes that, while not diagnosticians, school staff and teachers observe children within a broad normative range and are in a unique position to recognize and refer youngsters who may be in need of professional psychiatric help. The variety of materials included in the Red Flags kit allows for flexibility in introducing Red Flags to school personnel: a Power Point presentation for use at a teacher in-service, reproducible handouts, and a brief video suitable for a faculty meeting.
Red Flags provides parents with a brief and easy to read booklet that describes childhood mental disorders as no-fault brain disorders, and outlines typical behavioral symptoms in children and adolescents. The booklet explains the what, when, and how of accessing professional help. Additionally, the toolkit contains a variety of teacher-tested strategies and materials for engaging and assisting parents.
Two units for students are designed to be presented a year apart. Year One reviews the role of the brain in emotional and behavioral health, and offers practical suggestions on achieving and maintaining optimal mental health. Using the video, "Claire's Story", students learn to recognize symptoms of depression in themselves or their friends, how and where to ask for help. The second year video *"Thick_'n_Thin,"* helps students also learn a variety of helpful coping mechanisms, and discusses the dangers of poor coping choices such as cutting, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts.

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Counties Implemented: Auglaize, Erie, Crawford, Richland, Morrow, Lorain, Fairfield
Summit, Cuyahoga, Stark, Portage, Mahoning, Jefferson