



# every moment counts

promoting mental health throughout the day

## What is Every Moment Counts?

**3-Year Project Funded by:** Office of Exceptional Children (OEC), Ohio Department of Education (ODE)

**Project Director:** Susan Bazyk, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, Cleveland State University

Every Moment Counts is a mental health promotion initiative developed to help all children and youth become mental healthy in order to succeed in school, at home and in the community. This work focuses on reframing mental health as a positive state of functioning – it is more than the absence of mental illness. Positive mental health is associated with feeling good emotionally and doing well functionally in everyday life. For children and youth, this means doing well during academic (classroom) as well as nonacademic (recess, lunch, after-school extracurricular activities) times of the school day.<sup>1</sup>

**Why should everyone care about mental health?** Mental health is an integral part of overall health. Children and youth who experience positive mental health and well-being function better during academic and non-academic times of the school day and do things to take care of their health.<sup>2</sup>

## Project Emphasis

**1. Mental health promotion.** Project model programs and resources focus on creating school environments that foster participation and enjoyment for all children and are based on research in the areas of mental health promotion<sup>3</sup> and positive psychology.<sup>4</sup> Strategies that have been found to improve mental health include participation in enjoyable activities,<sup>5</sup> using personal strengths, thinking optimistically, performing acts of kindness and expressing gratitude.<sup>6</sup> Mental health promotion efforts also include creating supportive environments, reducing stigma and discrimination, and supporting the social and emotional learning (SEL) of all students.

**• Who can be a Mental Health Promoter?**

Everyone! All school personnel can play an active role in mental health promotion using embedded strategies. Although the mental health field has traditionally been viewed as the domain of mental health specialists, experts are calling for a paradigm shift to better prepare all school personnel to pro-actively address the mental health needs of all students.<sup>7</sup>

**2. Inclusion** of students with disabilities and mental health challenges during all aspects of the school day and extracurricular after-school activities.

**3. Integrated services in natural contexts.** All programs developed and implemented for this project take place in natural school contexts (versus isolated therapy rooms) and involve integrated participation of students with and without disabilities and mental health challenges. Such integrated programming fosters social interaction and the development of friendships among students with and without disabilities.

**4. Collaboration among all school personnel and parents.** Integrated and inclusive programs require close collaboration among all relevant school personnel. Although this 3-year project is initiated by an occupational therapist and initially focuses on the development of occupational therapists as change agents, years 2 and 3 will emphasize collaboration with interdisciplinary teams involving 'indigenous resources' within schools – other related service providers (SLPs, PTs), lunch and recess supervisors, special and regular education teachers, para-educators, and physical and health educators to name a few. Integration of intervention strategies throughout the school day is critical for generalization of targeted skills.

Mental health is a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity.<sup>4</sup>

## Project Goals:

**1. Build capacity of all school personnel and families to promote mental health** and contribute to prevention and intervention of mental health challenges in all children through education and online resources; and

**2. Develop and implement model programs and embedded strategies** throughout the school day to promote positive mental health through enjoyable participation.

**3. Dissemination** throughout Ohio using a variety of strategies including online resources, professional development seminars, and toolkits.

## Guiding Framework: Public Health Approach to Mental Health

Similar to RtI and PBIS, a multi-tiered public health approach is used to provide a range of services and supports geared to meet the mental health needs of children and youth with and without disabilities and/or mental health challenges. Depicted as a pyramid representing a multi-tiered system of interventions and supports, this approach is designed to meet the mental health needs of all students at the universal, whole-school (all students); targeted (at-risk); and intensive individualized levels. This framework supports a change in thinking from the traditional, individually focused deficit-driven model of mental health intervention to a whole- population strength-based approach.

## Model Programs and Embedded Strategies

All of the model programs and toolkits for this project are developed to be embedded by relevant school personnel throughout the day using a combination of educational strategies (power point presentations, information sheets, newsletters), posters and book-marks, and occupational therapy coaching.

- Creating a Comfortable Cafeteria
- Refreshing Recess
- Embedded Classroom Mental Health Promotion Strategies (Moments for Mental Health, Making Connections & Learning Together groups)
- Extracurricular Leisure Coaching

### *Focus on Enjoyment!*

**The task of a sound education, Plato argued twenty-five centuries ago, is to teach young people to find pleasure in the right things. If children enjoyed math, they would learn math. If they enjoyed helping friends, they would grow into helpful adults. If they enjoyed Shakespeare, they would not be content watching television programs. If they enjoyed life, they would take greater pains to protect it.<sup>9</sup>**

## Why Occupational Therapy?

Occupational therapists (OT) are skilled in analyzing the interaction between the skills needed to successfully participate in an activity (e.g. play & social interaction during recess, eating lunch) and how to modify the activity and/or environment in order to promote participation. As well as having a sound knowledge of the sensory and motor requirements of a task, OTs are skilled in addressing the social and emotional aspects of participation. In addition to the development of model programs and resources for *Every Moment Counts*, OT's role is to build capacity of school personnel to embed mental health promotion strategies throughout the school day.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bazyk, S. (ed.). (2011). *Mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention for children and youth: A guiding framework for occupational therapy*. Publisher: American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

<sup>2</sup>Keyes, C. L. (2006). Mental health in adolescence: Is America's youth flourishing? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76, 395-402.

<sup>3</sup>Barry, M. M., & Jenkins, R. (2007). Implementing mental health promotion. Edinburgh, Scot- land: Churchill Livingstone/Elsevier.

<sup>4</sup>Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60, 410–421.

<sup>5</sup>Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 359, 1367-77.

<sup>6</sup>Heller, D., Watson, D., & Ilies, R. (2004). The role of person versus situation in life satisfaction: A critical examination. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130, 574–600.

<sup>7</sup>Koller, J. R., & Bertel, J. M. (2006). Responding to today's mental health needs of children, families and schools: Revisiting the preservice training and preparation of school-based personnel. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 29, 197–217.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1999). Mental health: A report of the Surgeon General (Executive summary). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, & National Institute of Mental Health.

<sup>9</sup>Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1993). Activity and happiness: Towards a science of occupation. *Occupational Science: Australia*, 1, 38–42.

For further information:

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