School Mental Health Communities of Practice

Social Awareness Micro-Skills:

Encourage students to take an empathic perspective in order to better understand others' thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and perspective

Micro-skills are moment-to-moment activities that K-12 building and district administrators, educators and classroom personnel, school psychologists, counselors, and social workers (among other school personnel) can use to promote mental health, behavioral health, and academic success among K-12 students. Micro-skills are designed to assist you in knowing how to respond and intervene directly with students in need (e.g., those who are experiencing MH/BH concerns). Micro-skills are strength-based and asset-driven in nature, and can be used by individuals without formal MH/BH training (e.g., micro-skills are NOT clinical strategies that must be delivered by formally trained MH/BH professionals). Identifying actionable strategies that all school personnel can take to support students spreads the onus of responsibility for addressing the MH/BH needs of students to the entire school staff, providing a broad (and needed) level of support for students.

SEL Standard: *Social Awareness*: The ability to consider diverse perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It also reflects the ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior across settings and to be able to identify and use resources and supports from one's family, school, and community.

Social Awareness Micro-Skill: Encourage students to take an empathic perspective in order to better understand others' thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and perspective.

Social Awareness Resources:
- Act for Youth's Social Awareness Resources:
  http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/sel/social_awareness.cfm
- CASEL's Social Awareness Video:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IfIFLzG_Jc&list=PLqSvevVI2ir-MthHDHyBhgEvWVsjgqbzO&index=7&t=2s
- Landmark School Outreach's Social Awareness (Social Emotional Learning):
  https://www.landmarkoutreach.org/strategies/social-awareness-sel/
- Ripple Kindness: https://ripplekindness.org/
- Start Empathy: https://startempathy.org/
- Teaching Tolerance: https://www.tolerance.org/
- Transforming Education's Social Awareness Toolkit:
  https://www.transformingeducation.org/social-awareness-toolkit/

The following are micro-skills that school personnel can use to encourage students to take an empathic perspective in order to better understand others' thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and perspective:

Teach students what empathy is and why it is important

- School personnel can teach students about empathy by:
  - Explaining that empathy means understanding and caring about another person's feelings and taking action to help when someone is in need or upset.
  - Giving students examples of how to act in an empathic way, such as helping, showing kindness, or actively listening to someone else.
  - Stressing the importance of noticing and having empathy for people beyond immediate friends, including those who may be different from you.

Model empathy for your students

- School personnel can model empathy by:
  - Acknowledging and valuing others' feelings and perspectives.
  - Speaking kindly and respectfully to others.
  - Actively listening to others when they share something.
  - Showing compassion and understanding to those who are sad, upset, distresssed, frustrated, or in need of help.
  - Showing geniune interest in others' lives and getting to know them better on an individual level.
  - Intentionally asking others to share their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives with you (and genuinely listening to them).

Create opportunities for empathy at school

- School personnel can encourage empathy at school by:
  - Implementing a Random Acts of Kindness initiative.
  - Teaching students empathy by using the **CARE** technique:
  - **C**all attention to uncaring behavior.
  - **A**ssess how uncaring behavior affects others, helping students understand the other person's perspective.
  - **R**epair the hurt and make amends.
  - **E**xpress disappointment for the uncaring behavior, while stressing expectations for caring behavior in the future.
  - Creating opportunities for students to get to know one another better, especially those who are not already friends.

Help students acknowledge others' experiences

- School personnel can help students learn to:
  - Acknowledge non-verbal cues and body language. For example, if someone is slumping in a chair and appearing withdrawn, say something like "I noticed that you are quieter than usual today. Is something bothering you?"
  - Acknowledge facial cues. If someone appears mad or angry, say something like "I noticed that you look upset today. Would you like to talk about it?"
  - Acknowledge situational and behavioral cues. If someone is sitting away from the main group and appears nervous or timid, say "I noticed that you didn't join the group. Do you mind if I sit over here with you?"

Teach students active listening skills

- School personnel can teach students active listening skills by:
  - Looking at the person, and giving them your full attention (e.g., stop doing other things).
  - Listening to both the person's words and their feelings.
  - Being sincerely interested in what they are telling you.
  - Restating what the person has told you.
  - Asking clarifying questions (if needed).
  - Being aware of your own feelings and opinions.
  - Stating your own views AFTER you have listened to the other person.

Encourage students to respect and celebrate differences

- School personnel can encourage students to respect and celebrate one another's differences by:
  - Teaching students to be critical thinkers about prejudice and discrimination.
  - Modeling the behaviors and attitudes you want your students to develop (e.g., respect, courage, fairness, honesty, responsbility, trust, integrity, care, compassion).
  - Holding students accountable for their actions toward others while at school.
  - Providing students with opportunities to identify and celebrate strengths, talents, and virtues in people who are different than them.