











AMERICAN ACADEMY OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

## **Schools and Families United for the Mental Health and Well-Being of Children**

The mission of public schools is to educate all students. Mental health is essential to learning and to the social and emotional development of children. (President Bush's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health Report, 2003)

The critical role of schools in the mental health and well-being of children has been recognized at the highest levels of government:

What we need is a network that looks out for children if children are recognized as having mental health problems ... <u>Schools</u>, churches, scouting can all play a role in ensuring that children get the help that they need.

David Satcher, M.D., Former U.S. Surgeon General, ACMHA Conference 2007

<u>Schools</u> are where children spend most of each day ... <u>Schools</u> are in a key position to identify mental health problems early and to provide a link to appropriate services.

President Bush's New Freedom Commission Report on Mental Health, 2003

Schools are in a key position to identify mental health concerns early and to openly communicate those concerns to families. Strong mental health programs and open communication with families promise to reduce the pain and isolation all too often experienced by youth with undiagnosed and untreated mental and emotional disorders.

Research shows that we do a poor job of identifying children and adolescents with mental health treatment needs. Here are the facts:

- 1. 10% of children and adolescents in the United States suffer from serious emotional and mental disorders that cause significant functional impairment in their day-to-day lives at home, in school and with peers (Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1999).
- 2. In any given year, only 20% of children and adolescents with mental disorders are identified and receive mental health services (Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1999).
- 3. Treatment of many serious emotional and mental disorders is effective. Psychotherapy, behavioral interventions, medication, and other interventions have been demonstrated to be effective for many childhood disorders. (Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1999).

4. Untreated, these disorders can have devastating consequences, including the loss of critical developmental years, extremely poor academic performance, increased school drop-out and failure, involvement with law enforcement and the justice system, and the ultimate failure – suicide.

Nothing should infringe upon one of the basic tenets in education – the vital need for open communication between parents and schools about the health and well-being of children.

Bills that prohibit school personnel from openly discussing mental health related concerns with families perpetuate stigma by singling out and targeting mental illnesses in children. Surely, legislation would not be proposed that would prohibit schools from openly talking with families about issues related to other health conditions, like asthma or severe allergies.

As national organizations that work everyday with families impacted by mental disorders, we stand with national leaders calling for schools to play a more significant role in helping students with mental health treatment needs. Too many of these students in our nation are falling through the cracks, all too often with tragic results.

## **Take Action**

We call on you to reject legislation that has the potential to interfere with open communication between schools and families about mental health related concerns. This legislation drives up stigma, the single greatest barrier to children and adults living with mental illnesses accessing services and supports. Our organizations dedicate much of our work to eradicating stigma and are deeply concerned with anti-psychiatry activity that reinforces harmful stereotypes.

As a coalition of family and provider organizations, we stand ready to work with you to improve children's mental health and well-being in America. We look forward to working with you to ensure the development of effective systems of care and services for children and families.

## **Coalition Partners**

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) American School Counselors Association (ASCA)

Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation (CABF)

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (FFCMH)

Mental Health America (MHA – formerly the National Mental Health Association)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

A national coalition of parents, educators, mental health professionals, and physicians united in ensuring the mental health and well-being of our nation's children and adolescents.

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