



Back-to-School And Mental Wellness

For some young people, going back to school is an exciting time of new challenges and having fun with friends. But for other students, it can be a stressful period of change resulting in serious mental health challenges. Starting at a new school, entering a new grade, experiencing family disruptions or leaving home for college can be very stressful. One in five children will experience anxiety and depression during the school year.

"Sometimes students burden themselves with unrealistic expectations that result in feelings of discouragement and fears of failure," said Howard Hitzel, chief executive officer, BestSelf Behavioral Health. "Concerns about friends or classmates are a common cause of stress and often social media contributes to this problem. Some students complain about loneliness or about feeling disconnected from peers or family members." he said.

According to Hitzel, most colleges and universities have counseling centers that are very skilled at helping students make a successful transition to college life.

Peg Barrett, school advocate for Mental Health Advocates of WNY (MHA) and

president of the New York State School Social Workers, is hopeful that public and entertainment figures speaking out about their own experiences and local awareness campaigns will make mental illness acceptable to talk about. Reducing stigma and encouraging children and teens to speak up about their challenges are critical so they get the help they need.

"People like Lady Gaga and Prince William sharing their stories can open the door for others," Barrett said.

"Anxiety is the number one health issue for children and adults, and can result from exposure to social media, bullying, school violence, increased academic standards and other family issues," she said. "Kids are afraid to go school."

Last July, New York State enacted The Mental Health Education Act, requiring mental health education grades K-12 in all New York State schools. This first-in-the-nation law is advancing the movement to expand mental health literacy among young people giving them lifelong skills to understand mental health and wellness and increase their awareness of when and how to access treatment for themselves

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SELF-CARE TIPS TO MAINTAIN GOOD EMOTIONAL HEALTH

*Howard K. Hitzel, Psy.D., MPA
President/CEO, BestSelf Behavioral Health, Inc.*

- Get adequate sleep
- Engage in regular physical activity
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Spend positive time with friends or family members
- Set realistic expectations

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO IF THEY OBSERVE WARNING SIGNS IN CHILDREN AND TEENS?

NAMI

- Talk to pediatrician
- Get a referral to a mental health specialist
- Work with school
- Connect with other parents

On average, it takes

10 years

for an individual to get treatment after the first symptoms of mental illness appear. In that time, the issue can escalate from a manageable condition to a life-altering crisis.

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS



People Inc



EMPOWER

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION

Does your organization, church, temple, or community group want to combine forces with our organization? Do you individually want to engage with us to stop the stigma of mental illness? Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition by completing our membership form at letstalkstigma.org/membership-form.

It is going to take a massive community effort to move the needle on stigma, please become a part of the solution. Questions? Please contact mike@letstalkstigma.org.

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or others. According to Barrett, this effort is opening up a dialogue with students, teachers and social workers encouraging them to talk about their feelings.

In her role as school advocate, Barrett works with schools in Erie and Niagara County to implement mental health education and social work resources. It is a preventative focus by educating students and training their teachers and administrators. Barrett teaches a course titled Mental Health 101 to equip adults who work with children with the tools they need to promote mental wellness.

What else can be done to help young people? Barrett said instilling trust, teaching them coping skills and empowering them to manage their day-to-day challenges can be helpful. Parents and caregivers can talk to children and be persistent if they don't open up immediately.

Another program of MHA is JustTellOne.org. Using peer-to-peer messaging online and in the classroom, its mission is to give youth the tools, language and confidence to start the conversation about their mental or behavioral health issues.

According to Carol Doggett, MHA senior director of marketing and outreach, "Young people struggling with a mental health issue often feel alone and isolated. In developing the JustTellOne program, we heard over and over how recovering youth felt their lives would have turned out differently if they had just one person they felt they could talk to."

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"The good news," said Doggett, "is that asking for help doesn't need to be a challenging task. It can be as simple as just telling one trusted person what's happening in your life."

"If you're the person someone turns to talk about a personal struggle, it means you are an important part of his or her journey. JustTellOne.org also has advice on how to be a 'trusted person' and give support."

By helping a person reach out for help as early as possible, you can increase the use of intervention services and decrease the likelihood of the issue turning into a life crisis.

Join the Conversation, continues to separate the truth from the stigma to increase awareness, understanding and acceptance for those living with mental health challenges, including children and teens. Everyone is encouraged to take the pledge to end the stigma surrounding mental illness.

Many members of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition offer services for children and young people. Visit letstalkstigma.org for more information.

Aquino Family Foundation Supports Anti-Stigma Coalition

The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition has received a \$3,000 gift from the Aquino Family Foundation to support the Join the Conversation campaign. The Aquino Family Foundation funds a wide range of non-profit organizations and initiatives in the areas of health, wellness and community improvement in Western New York and New Jersey.

"We are pleased to support the campaign and its goal of reducing the stigma of mental illness," Dr. Michael Aquino, Foundation president, said. "If individuals are not hindered by fear or shame, they can reach out and seek the help they need to recover and lead healthy, productive lives."

For more information about donating to the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition, contact Carol Doggett at cdoggett@mhawny.org.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

of Western New York Inc.

Spotlight: A Q&A with Children's Mental Health Coalition of WNY

We recently spoke with **Mary Skorupa, Executive Director, Children's Mental Health Coalition of WNY, Inc.** whose organization is a founding member of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition.

Q: What is the mission of your organization?

The Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York is a grass roots, parent-run organization committed to ensuring that families of children with behavioral, social, emotional, developmental and learning challenges have access to needed information, support, and services within 19 counties in Western New York. We do this by promoting awareness of children's mental health issues, by bringing parental concerns to service planning tables and our legislators, and by fostering equal partnerships between parents/caregivers and child and youth service providers of all types.

Q: How does the stigma of mental illness affect the children and families you work with?

As a family-run, family-driven organization, our experience with the stigma of mental illness is personal. We know the sting of having a loved one shamed or dishonored as a result of their illness. We have lived with the brick wall that stigma places before us leaving our families with needs unmet and help unsolicited. Because of this, we work with passion and deep intent to provide support, collective action, partnership, and strength, in achieving the care necessary for all children and families.

Q: Why are you involved in the Join the Conversation campaign?

We believe unquestionably that the reduction of stigma will make for enhanced legislation, enriched policies, and advanced treatment to improve the lives of all those within our community.



So far, **2,569** people have taken the pledge to end the stigma of mental illness.

Take the pledge to end the stigma around mental illness.

We are getting closer to **our goal of 3,500 people to take the Pledge to End Stigma around Mental Illness by November 14th!** Help us get there by encouraging people you know to take the pledge.

letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge



Superhero Night at
Bison Baseball



Adult Mental Health
First Aid Training



Adult Mental
Health First Aid



To see a full list of events for the month of August, please visit, LetsTalkStigma.org

ERIE COUNTY
ANTI-STIGMA
COALITION

Join the Conversation

Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Founding Members:

BryLin Behavioral Health System • Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York, Inc. • Community Partners of Western New York • Compeer • Crisis Services of Erie County • Erie County Department of Mental Health • Erie County Office for People with Disabilities • Fellows Action Network • Fuerst Consulting Corporation • Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County The Mental Health Advocates of WNY • Millennium Collaborative Care Patrick P. Lee Foundation Preventionfocus, Inc. • Telesco Creative Group • The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation