



MEDICA CPD

5 EASY TO MISS WARNING SIGNS THAT A STUDENT NEEDS SUPPORT WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

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Sometimes it's obvious that a student needs support with their mental health, but other times, students can fall between the cracks because we're not sure what to look for, or don't realise the significance of some of the changes we see in a student. Below, I've explored some of the warning signs that are commonly missed and which might help you identify students in need of some additional support.

Absence or Lateness

As we keep records of absence and lateness anyway, it makes sense to make use of this data. What you should keep an eye out for is change - a child who is late more frequently than usual or who isn't coming to school might be a child who needs additional support. There are a wide range of reasons that might cause this - some of which are indicative of a mental health issue - perhaps they are too anxious to come to school, or depression is making it hard for them to get out of bed and leave the house. Other reasons for a change in attendance or lateness may be broader issues at home - but these may be issues, such as being a young carer, or fearing school because of bullying can put a child at increased risk of struggling with their mental or emotional wellbeing.

Injury

Injury can be indicative of self-harm or abuse. If injuries are appearing regularly, are unexplained or don't match the explanation given and you have other reasons to feel concerned about the child, then their injuries need further exploration. This needs to be done carefully and non-judgementally. It is also not uncommon for children who are physically abused to also self-harm so be prepared for a potentially complicated conversation and consider carefully how and when to involve your child protection / safeguarding lead. It is usually better to involve them sooner rather than later.

Withdrawal

Children who become increasingly withdrawn and isolated both may be struggling with issues that they feel their friends won't understand, or that they just don't know how to explain. They may simply be overwhelmed by how they're feeling and not have the capacity to engage; or they may have such low self-esteem that they can't see why anyone would want to spend time with them.

Illness

Especially in younger children, emotional issues can present as physical issues - a child who is often sick, nauseous or has headaches for which there is no clear physical cause, may be struggling with overwhelming emotions. It is worth looking for a pattern to see if there are specific triggers that can be dealt with. Many people assume that the child who always has a tummy ache on Tuesday just before geography is making it up just to get out of geography - but it is perfectly possible that they are so anxious about the lesson that they genuinely do develop a tummy ache. It's important we enable a child to feel heard rather than dismissing them if the present regularly with physical symptoms.

Loss of enjoyment

Children who no longer enjoy things they previously engaged happily with, whether in class or leisure time are a cause for concern. This is a common symptom of depression and low mood and is a key indicator, especially in previously bright and bubbly children, that all is not well.

When to Worry? Look for longevity and Impact

With all of the warning signs, the key thing that helps us to distinguish whether we need to take action is how long the signs are present - if it's more than a few days we should be worried. Secondly, we should be concerned when the signs we're seeing are having a significant impact on the pupil's ability to engage with normal day to day activities. Longevity and impact are also two things a doctor will always look for before making a diagnosis of e.g. anxiety or depression.

You can hear more from Pooky at our Annual Children's Mental Health Conference, October 3rd 2018. To find out more information or to book call us on 0141 638 4098.