



Reinventing School with
**COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL
HEALTH PRACTICES**

**Defining
Comprehensive
Mental Health
Practices**



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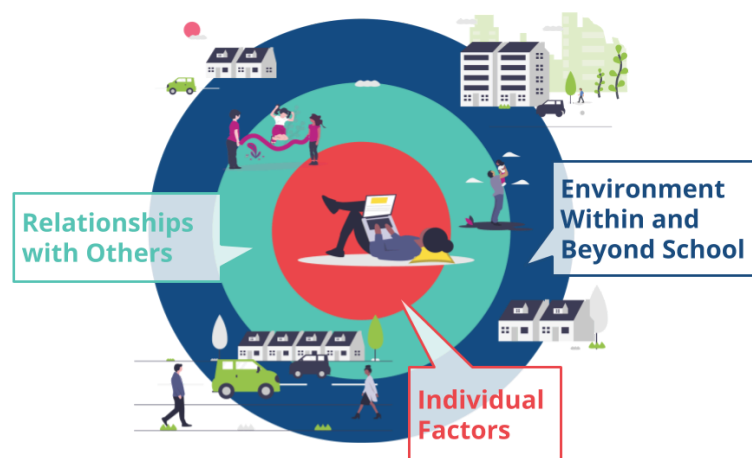
**Schools &
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DEFINING COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES

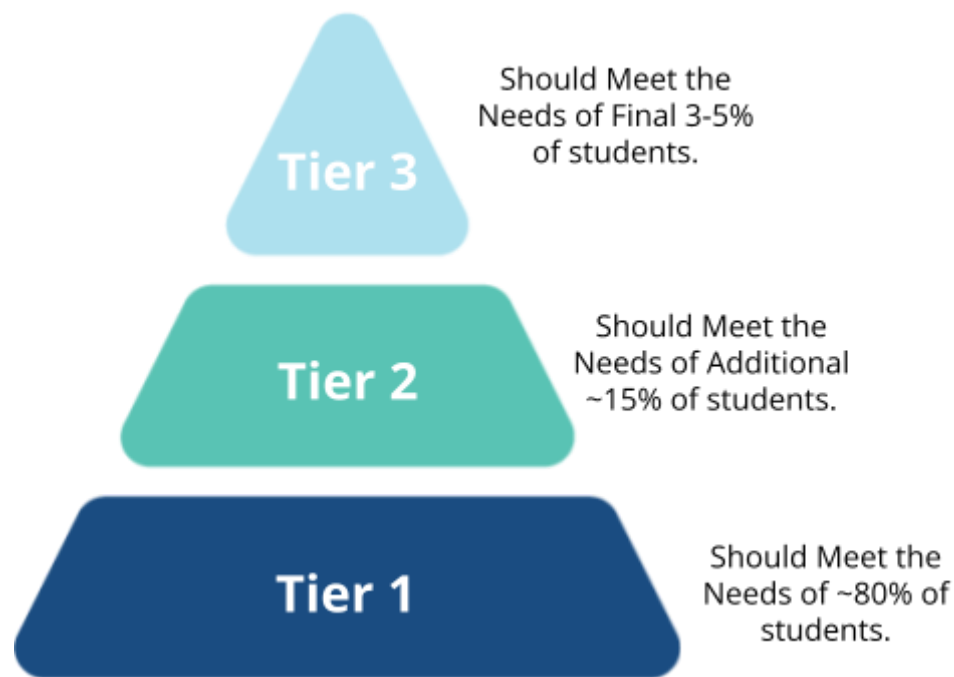
Comprehensive mental health practices address the various factors that influence an individual's state of well-being and provide multiple tiers of support.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. Mental health is influenced by a complex mix of biological, environmental, social, and psychological factors so, while genetics do influence mental health, an individual's development, as well as the context in which development occurs, also play a critical role in shaping mental health throughout one's life. It is important for those designing and working in schools to understand three factors known to influence mental health ([Transcend, 2020](#)):



- **Environment Within and Beyond School:** The wider social, political, cultural, and economic environment in which a young person grows up heavily impacts the access that they, their families, and their communities have to different services, as well as the degree of social acceptance and equity versus hate and discrimination they experience. The environment and the values, beliefs, and practices that underpin it also influence how valued and in control of their lives young people feel, factors important to mental health and thriving.

- **Relationships with Others:** A young person’s capacity to thrive is deeply influenced by opportunities to engage with peers, family, and other adult figures in developmentally supportive ways. Such relationships buffer against stress and trauma, help young people explore their identities, and support the development of important skills and mindsets.
- **Individual Factors:** Various individual factors influence mental health by shaping a young person’s ability to understand and manage their own thoughts and feelings, direct their actions in daily life, and navigate their relationships with others, as well as with the larger context around them.





Given that mental health is dynamic and influenced by the factors above, school plays a critical role in young people’s mental health. It can remove barriers to access and make practices and supports universally accessible to all students. Since each student brings unique assets and needs in terms of their mental health and development, a comprehensive mental health approach should not only tend to all three factors above, but it should also include several levels of support through a [Multi-Tiered System of Support](#) (MTSS).

A MTSS is a data-driven, problem-solving framework to improve outcomes for *all* students. [MTSS](#) relies on a continuum of evidence-based practices matched to student needs. It usually has three tiers: (1) **Universal** mental health promotion for all students. (2) **Selective** services for

students identified as at risk for a mental health concern or problem. (3) **Indicated** services for individual students who already display a mental health concern or problem. Learn more about Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports from this [Q&A webinar hosted by TEA](#).

The table below presents general approaches and specific tiered practices that address each of the factors described above:

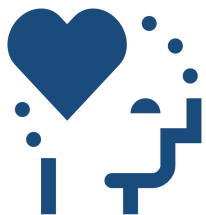
General Approach to Address Each Factor	Description	Specific Tiered Practices
<p>FOSTER A SAFE, SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE</p> 	<p>The National School Climate Center defines a positive school climate as “one that fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life and ensures all students have an equal opportunity to succeed and become socially conscious and ethical members of society.”</p> <p><i>Resources to Learn More:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments • Create a Safe School Environment from Transcend’s Mental Health Toolkit 	<p><u>Tier 1 Practices:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline policies and practices are restorative, appropriate, and equitable • Climate is culturally responsive and relationship rich • School routines elevate student voice and choice <p><u>Tier 2 Practices:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers create “safe spaces” in the classroom for when students need it • Student is put on a behavioral support plan <p><u>Tier 3 Practices:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students meet with counselors to build specific skills (e.g., self-regulation)
<p>BUILD POSITIVE ADULT AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS</p> 	<p>A positive peer or adult relationship is a two-way, “close connection through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them.” (Search Institute).</p> <p><i>Resources to Learn More:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Developmental Relationships Download from Search Institute • Relationship Mapping Strategy from Harvard 	<p><u>Tier 1 Practices:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students are part of an advisory group • Clubs, group work, recess, etc. provide opportunities for students to connect <p><u>Tier 2 Practices:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer mentors work with students struggling to connect • Teacher appoints student to a “helper” position • Teachers hold one-on-one check-ins with students <p><u>Tier 3 Practices:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wraparound supports and community partnerships provide additional opportunities

- [Foster Supportive Relationships](#) from Transcend’s Mental Health Toolkit

for connection

- Student meets with a social worker or counselor

DEVELOP SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES



Social-emotional learning competencies are the specific skills, habits, and mindsets “necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” [CASEL](#)

Resources to Learn More:

- [What is SEL?](#) from CASEL
- [A Guide to the Core SEL Competencies](#) from Panorama
- [SEL + MTSS Connection Guide](#) from CASEL

Tier 1 Practices:

- All adults build SEL competencies and model them for students
- All students receive explicit SEL instruction
- All students have opportunities to practice SEL skills across contexts

Tier 2 Practices:

- Small groups of students receive extra support in SEL competencies at lunchtime

Tier 3 Practices:

- Students meet with psychologists in the school or in the community

THE POTENTIAL OF COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES

Rigorous research studies are beginning to show that comprehensive mental health practices have a variety of positive outcomes for students and teachers.

The concept of Comprehensive School Mental Health Practices is complex and broadly defined. The impact of many approaches and practices under this umbrella have been quantified. Below, you will find evidence on the impact of some of the practices listed above:

Developing social-emotional competencies can **improve academic outcomes** (by 13 percentile points in one meta-analysis), can have a **positive impact on school climate**, and can **reduce mental health challenges and drug abuse** ([CASEL](#)).

A Multi-Tiered System of Support can **decrease student internalized behavior challenges such as worry or withdrawal and externalized behavior challenges such as defiance or fighting** (Cook et al., 2015 ; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012), **decrease student concentration problems** (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012), **improve student social-emotional functioning** (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012), and **improve academic performance** (Bradshaw et al. 2012).

Strong developmental relationships with teachers are associated with young people having **higher grade point averages**, feeling **connected to school**, feeling **culturally respected and included**, experiencing **positive life outcomes**, and being **resilient** (8x more likely, in fact) in the face of challenging tasks ([Search Institute](#)).

A healthy, positive school climate is associated with higher academic achievement, higher attendance, better psychological health, increased safety, and lower rates of aggression. ([Rennie Center](#))

Strong developmental relationships with peers **strengthens young peoples' self-discovery and awareness, self-confidence and life skills, leadership abilities, and academic motivation, as well as broadens perspectives** on themselves, others, and the world ([Search Institute](#)).

The positive outcomes associated with comprehensive mental health practices may be driven by their potential to help schools take various Leaps toward more equitable, 21st century learning.

Mental health, as well as related factors such as resilience, are well-established as enhancing an individual's ability to contribute meaningfully in daily life and to thrive despite obstacles. When carefully planned and implemented, comprehensive school mental health practices can meet the unique and holistic needs of *all* children. Therefore, they have the potential to help schools take the following [Leaps](#) toward more equitable, 21st-century learning:



Moving from a Narrow Focus to

A WHOLE-CHILD FOCUS

Comprehensive mental health practices nurture learners holistically—cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially. An environment that is safe and relationship-rich nourishes the whole child and places students in an emotional state conducive to deeper, more lasting learning. These practices broaden the definition of success and enable students to gain a wider range of skills. Building competencies around mental health are critical for successfully navigating one's professional pathways, personal relations, and health.



Moving from Assimilation & Marginalization to

AFFIRMATION OF SELF & OTHERS

Seeing one's identity reflected and celebrated in the climate of a school promotes a sense of belonging and self-efficacy. When adults and peers affirm a student's identity, they are more likely to find value in school and find learning more motivating and relevant. Possessing mental health competencies helps deepen learners' understanding of themselves and others, which prepares them for success in an increasingly diverse world.



Moving from Inflexible Systems to

CUSTOMIZATION

Comprehensive mental health practices honor the fact that each student is unique and has different assets and needs. The three-tiered system ensures that each student gets what they need, which can result in more equitable outcomes by honoring individuals—their life experiences, what they value and want to achieve, where they are developmentally, and what they need to be successful.



Moving from Isolation to

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

Comprehensive mental health practices foster belonging, enable students to connect with others, and contribute to positive emotions. When each child is seen and known by adults, peers, and the school community, it can buffer against trauma and remove physical and psychological barriers to the learning process. Connecting with peers through collaborative learning can help young people see value in the experiences they have at school, and can provide a scaffold that makes learning more manageable and memorable.

SETTING UP & SUPPORTING COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES

Implementing and continuing to support comprehensive mental health practices will require your school to make a variety of decisions, as well as set up systems and supports.

In order to implement comprehensive school mental health practices well, a number of systems and supports are needed. Below, we have synthesized insights from a number of sources, including the research cited above, insights from rigorously developed resources like Transcend's [Mental Health Toolkit](#) and CASEL's [SEL Implementation Guide](#), and learnings from those who have already implemented these practices. We have also indicated where systems and supports connect to the five [Effective Schools Framework Levers](#).

ESF Lever 1

STRONG SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND PLANNING

- ❑ Focused Vision and Plan for Comprehensive Mental Health Practices: Given the different focus areas mentioned above, get clear on what comprehensive mental health practices will look like at your school, given your unique context. Include input from teachers, students, families, and community members and ensure that voices from those traditionally left out of school decision-making processes are elevated. Focus on “key priorities, clear timelines, milestones, metrics, and task owners” before setting a plan into motion.

- ❑ **Student Outcomes:** As suggested in Harvard's [Preparing for Effective SEL Implementation](#), articulate a series of short- and long-term outcomes that are reasonable goals or expectations for the specific SEL effort. These include (a) short-term indicators of children's growth and progress in areas proximal to the specific SEL activities, and (b) longer-term indicators of more distant, future impacts.
- ❑ **Menu of Evidence-Based Practices Aligned to Each Tier of an MTSS:** Keep in mind that the tiers are not either or—all students experience Tier 1 practices, a smaller group also experiences Tier 2 practices, and an even smaller group experiences all practices. In addition to identifying practices, consider who will be involved in implementing them and what time and resources will be needed.
- ❑ **A Screening and Data Collection Process:** There are a [variety of valid and reliable screening tools](#) that you can use or modify to identify students in need of additional support. Collect and reflect on data in ways that generate information that helps you compare how individual students are doing in relation to classmates, district peers, and/or the nation. Whenever possible, it is also helpful to consider and compare multiple sources of information, including insights from teachers, parents, and students themselves.
- ❑ **Monitoring of Implementation and Outcomes for Continuous Improvement:** Data is collected and analyzed regularly to “identify trends and adapt accordingly.” Leaders use quantitative learnings, as well as inputs from the community for ongoing, short-cycle data analysis and adjustment. This data is held up against the vision for comprehensive mental health practices. Those insights are shared back to the community, including what changes will be made based on learnings.



ESF Level 2

EFFECTIVE, WELL-SUPPORTED STAFF

- ❑ Adult Capacity and Culture: Adults need to develop the ability to support the mental health of their students. This entails **building their own social-emotional competence**, dismantling implicit biases that they may hold, and developing a deep understanding of mental health and how it is fostered and maintained. Adults can also share their use of, and their challenges with, social and emotional skills in order to model decision-making and even failure.
- ❑ An Established School Intervention Team: Develop a core team to manage the development and implementation of multi-tiered support strategy. This team should meet regularly and should pull in other staff, parents, and students whenever the need arises.

ESF Level 3

POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

- ❑ Positive and Restorative Behavioral Expectations: Clearly outline protocols to address bullying, harassment, bigotry, and other related behaviors. Restorative practices help students understand the impact of their behavior, encourage respectful interactions with others, build self-awareness, and focus on repairing any harm done to the community. Provide support to those who struggle to fulfill behavioral expectations.
- ❑ Effective Classroom Management Strategies: Set routines and shared norms that enable social-emotional development and are characterized by caring and supportive interpersonal relationships.



They should also promote student voice and autonomy and provide diverse opportunities for students to be meaningfully involved in classroom decision-making.

- ❑ **Community Partnerships:** Leverage community partnerships to ensure students receive additional opportunities and supports beyond what the school alone provides. Strategic and aligned mental health partnerships can provide counseling and mental health treatment, physical health services, expanded professional learning opportunities, extracurricular athletics and arts, and more.

Partner with Families: Families are integral to promoting and sustaining the mental health of their children. Forging partnerships between schools and families can reinforce the work being done in each context and help ensure the unique goals, assets, and culture of each family are honored.

ESF Level 4 & Level 5

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT

- ❑ **Explicit Teaching of Social-Emotional Skills:** Instruction should be: (1) Focused on specific knowledge, skills, and mindsets with learning objectives that are clear to students; (2) Thoughtfully paced and sequenced, so that learning goals feel manageable and connected to prior knowledge and so that there are opportunities for practice with feedback; and (3) Active and hands-on, so that motivation is supported, learning is memorable, and students have opportunities to engage in metacognitive thinking related to their use of social-emotional competencies.
- ❑ **Opportunities to Practice Across Contexts:** Students should have many opportunities to practice using social-emotional competencies across a range of contexts throughout and beyond the school day. This can be done by weaving SEL standards into your existing academic standards and, more generally, by using pedagogical approaches that encourage collaborative learning and self-direction, so that students can apply their social-emotional learning.
- ❑ **Incorporate Physical Wellness:** Since the relationship between physical and mental health is bidirectional, provide opportunities for physical activity, support health education, and ensure students have access to nutritious foods.

SCHOOLS & RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

There are many schools in Texas (and beyond) who are already doing amazing work implementing comprehensive mental health practices.



[Hope Squad at Birdville ISD](#) (TX) is a school-based peer support program that empowers students to take action to prevent suicide through a partnership with their local mental health agency. Nominated by classmates as trustworthy peers, Hope Squad members serve as the eyes and ears of the school and report to adults any student who seems to be struggling or at-risk for suicide. Advisors train Hope Squad members on how to identify at-risk students, provide friendship, and seek help from an adult.



[Klaras Center for Families](#) (TX) operates in collaboration with: Waco ISD, Midway ISD, LaVega ISD, Lorena ISD, Robinson ISD, Connally ISD, and Whitney ISD. The program brings KCF's services directly into the educational milieu allowing children to receive services on-site at their designated school campus. This typically places a tandem of two staff, including a case manager and a counselor who are integrated into the school setting. School districts identify their most intense students in need of mental health services and provide KCF with direct access and designated space to provide these much-needed services.



Brooklyn LAB's (NY) goal for [Success Coaching](#), a Tier 1 protocol for one-on-one check-ins between teachers and students and part of a multi-tiered system of SEL supports, is to help students feel connected to the Brooklyn LAB community, each other, and their learning. The four parts of Success Coaching are: Build Relationships, Build Connection, Set Goals, and Reflection. Progress and check-ins are [tracked](#) to ensure that each student is getting the one-on-one attention they need. [Strength Building](#) is a Tier 2 intervention within LAB's MTSS of SEL supports. After a teacher meets for at least 4 weeks with a student, using the Success Coaching protocol, s/he may identify one of the Building Blocks that the student would benefit from developing in a different setting. That teacher would note this in the Success Coaching tracker, and then the school's social worker or other staff with expertise in social and emotional development would group students to provide



this support. Finally, it is important to note that Success Coaching and Strength Building were designed to bridge a gap surfaced in remote learning, but will be a continued structure when students return to school.



(Washington, DC) Through their partnership with Transcend, [Van Ness Elementary, which is part of DC Public Schools, in is sharing their SEL model](#) through the Whole Child Collaborative. Van Ness promotes a school-wide set of practices, including routines, environments, and mindsets, which enables students and staff to feel safe and ready to learn. One aspect of this model is [Strong Start](#) - a set of rituals and routines that get students ready to learn by fostering a sense of safety, belonging, community, and self-efficacy. The routines begin as students enter the classroom and continue through a morning meeting. Van Ness has also adapted Strong Start (and many other parts of their model) [to be implemented virtually](#).

There are many additional mental health resources that can further deepen your understanding of the approach and prepare you for implementing them.

Use the resources below to learn more about comprehensive mental health practices and the programs that help support their implementation.

Resources and Organizations	Description
Texas Behavior Support 	<p>The goal of the Texas Behavior Support (TBS) Network is to create a system of PBIS for students with disabilities and all students attending Texas public schools. Although the original focus of TBS was to support the behavior needs of students with disabilities, it quickly became evident in examining the newly expanding PBIS model that, in order to address the needs of children in special education, prevention interventions had to be implemented for all students. Therefore, the TBS Network adopted PBIS as its philosophical foundation and supports all three tiers of the model, including school-wide and classroom.</p>
T.I.E.R. 	<p>TIER stands for Tiered Interventions Using Evidence-Based Research. With the assistance of TEA, The Meadows Center and University of Texas in Austin, a clear vision has been developed to build capacity within every LEA in Texas in order to effectively implement the statewide models for MTSS.</p>

Mental Health and Behavioral Health

This website seeks to assist school personnel with resources for supporting student mental health. In Texas, there are numerous collaborative efforts, statutes, services, programs, and strategies available to support the identification of mental health challenges and to address them. Includes sections on [Safe, Supportive, and Positive School Climate](#) and beyond.

Transcend Mental Health Toolkit

This toolkit contains information on eight practices that can help schools support mental health. Click on the icons to see more on each practice.

Curated Collection Supporting Emotional Well-being

This resource shares specific remote social and emotional well-being practices used by schools to prioritize relationships, emotional awareness and healing, student voice and agency, and routines and consistency.

Texas Tech Center for Adolescent Resiliency

The Center has two main programs that offer participating youth the opportunities to participate in a wide range of activities, [Community Advocacy Project for Students \(CAPS\)](#) and [United Future Leaders](#). Both programs have spawned additional program development. These transformative learning experiences help adolescents build strong relationships with peers, mentors, and other role models who prepare and equip them for high school, college, and adult responsibilities.

Educator Wellness: Equipping Staff to Return to School

TEA's Highly Mobile and At-Risk Student Programs Division conducted a Virtual Listening Tour with nine LEAs during Spring 2020 to better understand the complex needs and challenges experienced by educators, to identify training and guidance needs, and to cultivate innovative strategies and solutions that can be shared with all schools. Division staff also studied national best practices and guidance provided by multiple organizations that promote well-being in schools.

Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM)

Over the last 4 years, over 14,500 youth in 29 schools in North Texas (charter, public, private) with the YAM program. The YAM program includes education on the following themes:

1. Awareness about mental health
2. Self-help advice
3. Stress and crisis

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4. Depression and suicidal thoughts
 5. Helping a troubled friend
 6. Getting advice: who to contact

**National Center on
Intensive Intervention:
Home** 

This page is intended to help educators and other building-based personnel find tools and resources to support students with intensive needs, including students with disabilities and those who have not responded to validated intervention programs delivered with fidelity. General and special education teachers, interventionists, school psychologists, school counselors, and others may find this information helpful.
