LEARNING DISABILITIES: MENTAL HEALTH

Why is it important to think about mental health in relation to learning disabilities?

Mental health is “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and is able to regulate their behaviour appropriately.”

- An estimated 40% of children with learning disabilities (LDs) also report anxiety, depression or self-esteem issues
- People with LDs are twice as likely to report distress, depression, and anxiety
- People with LDs report poorer overall health than people without LDs
- Children with LDs are at an increased risk for both bullying and victimization

A helpful factsheet with more information about LDs and mental health is available at http://ldatschool.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2015/02/MentalHealthLDsMythandFactSheet_access.pdf

This graph shows the percentage of teachers’ concerns for students’ differing mental health concerns (Source: Froese-Germain and Riel, 2012).

1 World Health Organization (2014)
How might we help children and adolescents experiencing LDs and mental health issues?

One method for helping people with LDs and mental health issues is called self-instructional training. Self-instructional training is a three-step process:

1. Adults offer verbal instructions to the child with an LD
2. Children learn to exercise self-control using their own speech (i.e., by stating instructions for behaviour aloud)
3. Children learn to self-evaluate in line with these instructions and statements without saying them aloud

Throughout the process, therapists teach children how to use “self-statements.” These statements include self-evaluation, self-monitoring and “I” statements where they begin by saying “I feel nervous when I don’t understand something”. This approach can help children interact in social situations.
REFERENCES


Froese-Germain, B., & Riel, R. (2012). Understanding Teachers’ Perspectives on Student Mental Health: Findings from a National Survey. Canadian Teachers’ Federation. 2490 Don Reid Drive, Ottawa, ON K1H 1E1, Canada.


