

Universal Interventions for Preventing Depression

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Universal preventive interventions target a whole population group, such as an entire classroom, school, or district. In other words, universal preventive interventions are not targeted specifically to students identified as at risk for depression, although these students also participate and benefit. Within a response-to-intervention (RTI) framework, these would be considered Tier 1 interventions. School-based universal interventions emphasize: building resilience within students, building protective schools, and raising awareness about depression.

SPECIFIC UNIVERSAL PROGRAMS

A wide range of prevention programs are available that are effective in contributing to the prevention of many student mental health problems, including depression. Examples are provided in Table 1. (see reverse)

BUILDING PROTECTIVE SCHOOLS

A more comprehensive, ecological approach to prevention considers the context or environment of the student as a contributor to the student's problems, including depression. Rather than focusing primarily on the individual characteristics of students, ecologically focused programs address the contextual (risk and protective) factors in the school as an indirect means to build resilience. Protective factors within the school include such things as school security and safety, social support, positive relationships with teachers and peers, and a sense of connectedness and belonging. Risk factors include such things as troubled relationships with peers and teachers, poor school climate, and inadequate classroom management. Activities that enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors within the school contribute to the prevention of depression and other mental health problems.

- The quality of students' relationships with peers and school staff has been found to be important for engagement with learning and connectedness to school, both important protective factors against depression. It is important that every student has a positive relationship with at least one caring adult in the school.

ACTION PLAN

- Create, join, or support a collaborative family–school–community problem-solving team in your school or district and use it to advocate for the implementation of a universal prevention program.
- Educate school personnel, parents, and community leaders about the role of protective factors in counteracting risk factors, building resilience, and promoting positive life outcomes for students. Emphasize the preventability of depression and the need for school-based prevention programs.
- Investigate several prevention programs. Choose one that most closely matches the needs of your school or district in terms of the skills it teaches and its affordability, feasibility, and acceptance. Consider this program as one segment on a continuum of interventions for depression that also includes targeted interventions for students at risk for depression and intensive intervention for those identified as depressed. Consider integrating such a program into the school's RTI framework.
- Develop a process designed to assess protective and risk factors for your students, determine which ones you can impact, and implement a plan to do so.

Table 1. Examples of Universal School-Based Programs for Preventing Depression

Name	Age/Grade Range	Access
<i>Resourceful Adolescent Program (RAP)</i> Classroom lessons built on cognitive behavior principles significantly reduce depressive symptoms with improvements maintained over 10–18 months	Grades 7–10	http://www.rap.qut.edu.au
<i>Beyondblue</i> Enhances resilience by teaching skills (problem solving, coping, emotional regulation, stress reduction, social competence, conflict resolution, assertiveness) and building social support	Grades K–12	http://beyondblue.org.au
<i>Children and Youth Resiliency Program</i> Produces cohesive peer-group, classroom, and school communities and a reduction in the number and severity of disruptive incidents and suspensions.	Ages 12–18	http://www.corstone.org/html/solutions/programs.cfm
<i>Program in Education, Afterschool, and Resiliency</i> Emphasizes building social competence and resilience through relationships with positive adults	Grades K–12	http://www.pearweb.org
<i>Second Step (Student Success Through Prevention)</i> Classroom-based lessons provide social and emotional education to children from the preschool years through middle school	Grades K–8	http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step.aspx
<i>Adolescent Depression Awareness Program (ADAP)</i> Provides education about the identification and treatment of adolescent depression to reduce the associated stigma, morbidity, and suicide	High School	http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/psychiatry/specialty_areas/moods/ADAP
<i>School Transitional Environment Project (STEP)</i> Restructures the school environment to facilitate transition and reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and delinquent behavior	Ages 12–18	http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/STEP%20(School%20Transitional%20Environmental%20Program)-MPGProgramDetail-428.aspx
<i>Caring School Community</i> To enhance school connectedness, creates a caring community of learners through class meetings, a buddy program, parent involvement, and school-wide components	Grades 1–6	www.devstu.org