

Mental Health Corner ep1

Dr. Holtzman: Welcome to Mental Health Corner podcast my name is Dr. Dan Holtzman, I am the Principal of Great Neck North High School. With me I have my mental health team who I'd like now to introduce.

Oana Scholl: This is Alana Scholl School Social worker.

Dr. Cheng: Hi David Cheng school psychologist.

Dr. Holtzman: And joining us shortly will be Dr. Anton Berzins, one of our other school psychologists. So this is the first podcast that we'll be doing as part of a series over the course of the school year and we want to bring awareness to the community and to parents about the importance of mental health. So over the course of the school year we'll be speaking about a specific topics related to our students, their mental health and their social emotional well-being. So that's part of the goals in the intention of the series, I like to ask the team I'd like to ask Oana and David what are some of the more serious issues that you see with regards to mental health and our students what are some approaches that we can take and are taking as a school?

Oana Scholl: Do you want to take that or should?

Dr Cheng: I can definitely get started, just off the bat I think one of the most prominent issues that is prevalent amongst most of the students is overwhelming stress when it comes to not only large exams like SAT's and ACT's but also chapter tests, quarterly's midterms and finals all throughout the school year, managing that stress thinking about the implications that comes along with that we respond to a host of stressors anxiety depression that's prevalent throughout, really.

Dr Holtzman: In your career every are you seeing an increase in those kinds of stressors with students?

Oana Scholl: I absolutely am. I've been with the Great Neck Public Schools since 2002 and I definitely have seen just a much bigger influx of students talking about anxiety talking about putting a lot of pressure on themselves even if sometimes it's not really coming from external forces as much and you know I think it's really for some people it's very very impactful and heavy for them every single day.

Dr. Holtzman: Are you seeing that they are having issues with coping with that stress and having coping mechanisms and coping strategies in order to deal with that stress and anxiety as it comes?

Oana Scholl: I think our whole student body and everyone needs to manage stressors on a regular basis. I think that even among students who don't experience anxiety that often there are times when it really gets very very intense depending on either what's going on for them in terms of what the way they're thinking about things or just what's going on situationally they might have a lot of due dates or a lot of things coming up and there are definitely times when the coping skills that are there just are not meeting the needs and you know students start to feel really overwhelmed or start to cry or start to just want to miss school for a day or two or more and so strengthening the coping skills is definitely one of one of my goals and working with the students.

Dr Holtzman: And are you seeing that the trigger is primarily academic or are there other factors that are influencing this stress as well?

Oana Scholl: I think among the students that I see the academic pieces certainly a big part of it and even for students that may not be doing that well academically so you might think that they don't care that much about school right now or they're not trying that anxiety can still sometimes be there and sometimes people avoid rather than you know jump in but I think it's a way of thinking that we develop over time and for some people they they worry about a lot of things in their life and you know I definitely one of my goals and working with students and parents to just help them to figure out how do we manage these bumps in the road without getting down on ourselves or thinking in a way that makes us feel more overwhelmed.

Dr. Holtzman: Doctor Cheng, I want to ask you, is this a problem that you believe is systemic to Great Neck Community or is this a problem that you are seeing as it as a person in the field of psychology that is prevalent amongst adolescents across the country?

Dr. Cheng: I think it's bigger than Great Neck, unfortunately. I think that Nationwide, we're going to see an increase of the impact of high stakes standardized testing, it's putting on students, children and adolescents. In New York state we started at third grade but across the country you're going to have more and more concerns and greater emphasis put on these high-stakes exams leads to greater stress as a response and we don't always have the skills to combat that.

Dr. holtzman: And I see that you know in some of the information that you brought with you today that you've got some statistics from the CDC in regards to mental health and people suffering from mental health. Can you share that with our listeners?

Dr. Cheng: The broad statistic that's frequently quoted is that one in five individuals are likely to experience a mental health disorder through the course of their life, that's lifetime prevalence. Specific to children and adolescents, last March, March 2019 the Journal of Pediatrics included in the journal Pediatrics the CDC published an article specifically targeting anxiety rates, depression and disruptive behavior problems. And of the over 50,000 households that were surveyed as part of the study, 7% were experiencing, currently, anxiety problems that

require the support of mental health treatment, 7.4% were experiencing behavioral conduct problems and 3.2% at least reported to depression. More likely than not, those are under representations of current figure but that's the most recent figure that we have right now.

Dr. Holtzman: So a parent hearing this for the first time, what does this mean for them? What kind of reaction or steps should be taken when hearing these kinds of statistics? And while they may not necessarily believe that it applies to their child in the moment, these are pretty telling statistics. So, it's happening somewhere to someone. What should parents do?

Oana Scholl: I always think the earlier that you really notice some of the things that are happening for your children and the more open the conversation is as far as letting them express their feelings, whether it's a positive feeling or negative feeling, it's just what it is and so, giving them the opportunity to express themselves openly and really listening and not jumping in with solutions right away. Part of my goal is to really raise awareness and encourage parents to figure out ways to support their kids to get on things early, rather than letting them get more and more serious. Sometimes the problem can be very tiny in the beginning and if you do the right thing and you are supportive about it it can really be resolved whereas if you kind of hope that it'll go away and you let it you know keep going it can really become much worse in the long run.

Dr. Holtzman: Now, Dr. Cheng, how important is it, in your opinion that the school home relationship truly be honed in regards to students Mental Health?

Dr. Cheng: I think it's very important. First and foremost the fact that we're having conversations like this that's going to hopefully foster some of those connections, but we have these statistics we see them on a regular basis we're presented with them on an ongoing basis. It's important that we do something with them. Assessment is one piece but it needs to lead to meaningful intervention.

Dr. Holtzman: Joining us now is Dr. Anton Berzins, one of our other school psychologists. Anton I was just asking Dave about the importance of the school home relationship as it connects to dealing with mental health issues I was wondering if you'd like to weigh in on that.

Dr. Berzins: Sure often times with the collaboration with the Guidance Department and obviously the variety of teachers at school, it facilitates a better conversation to have everybody on the same page so that if parents have any concerns or vice versa about a student's academic functioning with their social emotional functioning for something behaviorally happening they know instantly that they could reach out to their guidance counselor with those concerns and in turn, link us as the mental health team, either a social worker or school psychologist to meet with that student or have a small team meeting or have a parent team meeting so that in one way or another we find a way to meet with a student directly to adjust whatever the concerns were pretty swiftly if not the same day, definitely the next day or

definitely that week so they know that whatever they bring forward to us we are going to address in a very serious and sensitive manner.

Dr. Holtzman: If the issued goes beyond the scope of what the supportive counseling that that the mental health in the guidance team does, what resources are available to parents if the need should arise?

Dr. Berzins: Sure it happens more often than not when parents might say that they would like to be connected to someone within the community whether it's finding the resources through the insurance or finding a provider that works on sliding fee scales or finding someone who has the time and space to address the larger issues at hand. For example, in the school building, we have the luxury that we are available to have a big mental health team however there is a lot of moving parts, and the day goes by quickly and the student might not get that same direct one-to-one care in a school setting that they would get in a private setting, so that the family might want to complement what they are getting in school with the addition of a therapist or counselor and social worker just to reach out to us and we work with them to find some sort of support or resource of community agency that best fits what their needs are.

Dr. Holtzman: So, part of your role is having communication with the outside resource to help support the student in school.

Dr Berzins: Yes, often times that leads to the best results when the parents would sign a waiver or give us consent that the private mental health professionals, school team, and the family were in constant communication of knowing what the specific goals that they are working on in the private setting, how can we adjust it in the school setting actually holding each other accountable about the students progress versus say, keeping each arena in the dark, so to speak.

Dr. Holtzman: So what do schools do, what do we do as a school to help educate parents a bit more, David I know that we've been talking as a team about proactive education for parents. What's on the horizon as far as North High School is concerned?

Dr. Cheng: For us, you know, the parent group's it's great that they've been proactive about reaching out and sharing some concerns that they might have or topics they are interested in learning more about so we're trying to be as responsive as we can to those to bring in outside agencies to bring in Specialists, and educate across the district's health and mental health in particular are becoming such a priority so I think over the years recently we've seen an uptick in the different presenters that different PTO organization UPTC are bringing this year as a part of our mental health and wellness week we're having the Mental Health Association of Nassau County Come and present to parents in the community-at-large for an evening event on a December 12th which were excited to partner with a couple local parent groups SHAI, GNCA and UPTC to really promote and to educate parents and proactively hopefully that's definitely the intention and to respond to any questions or concerns that they have to bring an agency like

the Mental Health Association of Nassau County into the community and to help destigmatize and educate people.

Dr. Holtzman: And you mentioned something about Mental Health Week. What does that look like for North High?

Oana Scholl: So if I can take that one, Mental Health Week is now in its third year and it is kind of grown over the years Mental Health Week has a lot of moving pieces to it. In addition to the parent component which Dr. Cheng just mentioned we have a number of different things going on within the school for students. There are a number of professionals from the community that have agreed to come in and speak with our PE classes and that's happening for a second year in a row, we've had some wonderful Professionals in the past. Dr. Berzins has set up connections with a lot of people in the community and I know Dr. Cheng has been in touch with a couple people as well so I don't know if you if you want to give some examples ...

Dr. Berzins: Sure, we've had of basically Olympic Sports Psychologists who focus on peak performance, we've had acupuncturist, yoga Yogi's, we've had movement or fitness specialist so variety of presenters and it just keeps growing where people are talking about all aspects of Health from a physical point of view, a social emotional point of view, I guess you could say this idea of identifying intellectually or having prosocial positive habits or activities to combat if they're feeling stressed or are anxious or if they are feeling down so just having a variety of presenters from a variety of different professions to speak to our students so they can share their experiences and give their recommendations with our team so we're excited about that.

Dr. Cheng: I think that overall our approach really is to educate all the students and staff that mental health is one facet of wellness in general so if you look at the range of invited speakers and presenters that we've had it's not just people to come in and talk about suicide statistics, anxiety and depression, but it's also people to focus on the positive coping strategies that people can have, the healthy habits that people can develop at an early age, as part of overall wellness rather than maybe just the negative or, so to speak, stigmatizing factors of mental health.

Dr. Holtzman: And these are some of the things that we can talk about it in future podcast now and look at ways that students and families themselves can address those particular concerns because as you've mentioned, it is just one piece of it and there are several moving parts, to use your term Oana, that are needed in order to have a stable mental health and a stable physical health. So in looking at some upcoming potential podcasts that we're going to be doing, Anton you have come up with some good topics, do you want to share some possibilities for future podcasts?

Dr. Berzins: sure just to piggyback on this idea of wellness and it's this idea for The Growth Mindset by Carol Dweck, she's a famous Stanford Professor who wrote the best-selling

book about this idea of how do people handle adversity, how do they take constructive criticism ultimately are they entering into a situation with the mindset of them wanting to learn or them just want them to look smart or just look a certain way. So that's one topic that we could bring forward. Another idea is this idea of resilience when people are encounter an obstacle or some sort of challenge what resources do they have internally and externally to overcome. The idea is not just to survive but to thrive, so that's the language in resilience literature. Another is this idea of emotional intelligence. The research out of yale University where they have this idea called the RULER Method, helping people recognize and understand and label and express and regulate their emotions so that would be another avenue to discuss. Another hot topic is called Executive Functions so this idea of helping students be more organized to manage their emotions, prioritize, organize and manage their academic well being, kind of leading off of what our guest speakers talk about this at their Peak Performance and educating students and staff that anxiety is normal, it just depends on what do we do with that anxiety does it compel us to really be more focus and concentrate more on put forth more effort or or is that idea where we may not rise to the challenge so to speak. There are a lot of other topics that came to mind about organizational skills and test-taking skills, balancing parent-teacher expectations, helping out goal-setting, how to keep developing the positive school climate that we have and not just being satisfied that it's that we are bringing forth such topics but also to challenge ourselves to keep bringing topics forward within the school.

Dr. Holtzman: You're rattling off quite a bit of different kinds of topics how does a parent determine what's important? How does one prioritize? We can say that they're all very important, but if a parent, not knowing, how do they know what they know if they should listen to The Emotional Intelligence podcast, or should I have a conversation with my child about resilience? How does a parent decide that? How does a parent know which to prioritize with?

Dr. Berzins: I think it'll come through conversations with a child and maybe what's a topic that's being expressed the most at home and maybe conversely what's not being spoken about. So if the topic at the dinner table is always about academic success or athletic performance then maybe that might come to the point of their child, if they're saying, in an athletic competition the game was on the line and I missed it, but I put in the work and I was ready I just I just didn't convert - if this seems to be the theme of academically and athletically of maybe not meeting expectations, maybe that could be this idea of building into goal setting, emotional regulation, emotional intelligence. If it seems to be a theme that their teachers are reaching out to them, and they are noticing that they are a bright child but they're not consistently completing the work or under performing or is having some variety of performances than that might be another avenue or topic. So maybe what they are hearing from teachers, or what they themselves might be hearing from home with a child is bringing forth and actually having a conversation with your child and saying hey what's what your goals for this specific year and are you meeting it? Are you reaching it? Is there an obstacle in your way and how can I assist you? So that if a child has specific goals lead that conversation.

Dr. Holtzman: So, in closing some some takeaways that I have from here is that the home - school relationship is key to communication between school and the parents, and the

communication between the school and the parent and the students are very is very important and mental health shouldn't be a topic that we shy away from it's something that needs to be talked about and needs to be addressed and that the resources are available whether you start here in the school or you access them on the in the community, they are out there and they are available and if they're there is need if you're seeking them they can certainly contact their guidance counselor or the mental health team. It's important that programs like Mental Health Week in getting multiple groups involved in that you have the Phys Ed department, you've got the counseling department, mental health team that the theater group is putting together skits for 9th graders on warning signs of depression and anxiety and things of that nature so they see it firsthand what it what it looks like and ways in which that they could react to and then you got you know this, you got this discussion which we hope will be on going over the course of the year, serving as a resource for parents and hopefully parents will reach out and I think that's ultimately the goal for us so we'll wrap it up for this particular opening podcast, so Ms.Scholll, Dr.Cheng, Dr. Berzins and myself, Dr. Holtzman, we thank you for listening.

All: Thank you

Dr. holtzman: We'll see you next time on Mental Health Corner.

Announcer: The corner Mental Health Corner podcast is a production of the Great Neck Schools and was recorded at the studios at Great Neck North High School. This podcast was student produced under the direction of Michael Meehan. My name is Nathaniel Darvishzadeh.

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GNNHS NOVEMBER 2019