

How Staff Can Support Both Student and Personal Mental Health

From School Counselor Intern Triston Robb and School Counselor Alex Pratt

Teachers and staff at IMSA do a lot of great things for student's mental health. That work does not go unnoticed. Being in high school is not easy, and neither is being an IMSA student. Unfortunately, this can lead to unhealthy behaviors. It is never easy to see a student struggling in class or in general, but we have the power to make a difference in our student's lives and help promote healthy behaviors. Here are some tips for teachers and staff to help students with their mental health:

Promote mental health in the classroom.

- Encourage students to share their opinions and foster a positive classroom
- Make time for breaks and ice breakers (such as sharing a question of the day, sharing good news and bad news, etc.), that can help students get to know you, and their classmates which could help them feel more safe and comfortable in the classroom
- Add movement into your class, take your class outside to work, or for a short walk at the start of class or as a mid-class break
- Put on relaxing music while students are working
- Engage the class in a mindfulness activity such as listening to this [5-minute mindfulness bell](#), encouraging students to just focus on the sound of the bell and be present in the moment
- Start class with a deep breathing exercise. This may be especially helpful before a quiz or test, and only takes a minute or two. There are many breathing exercises on YouTube, [like this one!](#)

Research has shown several mental health benefits for students who engage in mindfulness in the classroom such as being able to focus better, lower levels of stress, and higher self-efficacy!

Familiarize yourself with the warning signs of a student who might be struggling.

- Pay attention if a student seems sad or withdrawn during class, or perhaps the student is starting to act out more. If you notice them visibly more stressed, or their behavior has drastically changed, have a conversation with the student privately before or after class. Let them know that you are concerned about them, that you care about them, and you want to help.
- Familiarize yourself with the resources available to students, and share those resources with students in need. There are many options that are available to

students based on what they may be struggling with such as the counseling team, the CAC office, tutors, RCs, and more.

Build relationships with your students

- Especially in this setting, where the students are not around their families, we have to build relationships with our students. When you build positive relationships with the students they feel more comfortable coming to you.
- You can encourage this by asking students how their day is going, asking them about their interests/hobbies, and sharing information about yourself to help the students see you as another human and not just their teacher or another IMSA staff

Research shows that a positive relationship with just one caring adult can improve a child's resilience against adversity and specifically adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

Promote social competence

- Help students interact with each other and work in groups.
- Encourage students to talk and work with different people, while also helping them feel comfortable in those situations.
- Model positive relationships with other faculty/staff.

Take care of yourself!

- Students look up to you, so if they see you taking care of yourself, it helps them learn to prioritize taking care of themselves.
- Did you know that all teachers and school personnel get free access to the [Down Dog](#) app? Yoga, meditation, and workout videos and resources are available there!
- Talk to a counselor! Check out our EAP program. Login to ComPsych and connect with a counselor at
<https://www.guidanceresources.com/groWeb/login/login.xhtml>