

Teachers and other school-based professionals can effectively treat children's mental health problems

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School-based services delivered by teachers and other school-based professionals can help reduce mental health problems in elementary-aged children, reports a study published in the March 2018 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP)*.

"Given the limited accessibility of traditional [mental health](#) services for children—particularly for children from minority and economically disadvantaged backgrounds—school-based mental health services are a tremendous vehicle for overcoming barriers to mental health care and meaningfully expanding the reach of supports and services for so many children in need. Treating children in schools can powerfully overcome issues of cost, transportation, and stigma that typically restrict broad utilization of mental health services" said lead author Amanda Sanchez, MS, of the Center for Children and Families at Florida International University.

"More than half of the children in the US who receive mental health care now receive such services in school settings. Our findings are encouraging in showing how—with sufficient training and support—mental health services can be quite effective when delivered by school-based professionals who are naturally in children's lives" added the study's senior author, Jonathan Comer, PhD., also of the Center for Children and Families at Florida International University.

The findings are based on a meta-analysis of 43 controlled trials that collectively had almost 50,000 elementary-aged [children](#) participate in school-based mental health services. The researchers examined the overall effectiveness of school-based mental health services, as well as the relative effectiveness of various school-based intervention models that differed according to treatment target, format, and intensity.

In addition to supporting the overall effectiveness of school-based [mental health care](#), follow-up analyses revealed that school-based services targeting child behavior problems were particularly effective, relative to services targeting child attention problems, mood and anxiety problems, or substance use. Moreover, treatments that were implemented multiple times per week were more than twice as effective as treatments that were only implemented on a weekly (or less) basis.

The authors caution that many schools—particularly those in low-resourced communities—do not have the personnel, training, or expertise to implement quality mental health services without additional support and partnerships with mental health professionals. In order to optimize the success and sustainability of school-based [mental health services](#), the authors call for increased support, training, and resources for school-based staff as they are increasingly expected to step beyond their traditional roles as educators.

More information: Amanda L. Sanchez et al. The Effectiveness of School-Based Mental Health Services for Elementary-Aged Children: A Meta-Analysis, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jaac.2017.11.022](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2017.11.022)

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