

Physical Education vs. Mental-Health Education

by Delaney Elling

Schools have provided PE, physical education, for hundreds of years. Why is mental health education not regarded in the same manner?

Physical Education vs. Mental-Health Education, a presentation to elementary school aged children, aims to highlight the hypocrisy of the American education system through interactive activities that allow children to learn about the importance of mental health.

The Problem

Mental illness has plagued the human population ever since the dawn of man. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 out of 4 or 5 children under the age of 18 will experience a mental disorder every year. The 17 million young people that meet the criteria for mental illness face considerable difficulties that affect their learning, behavior, and expression of emotion. Causing severe impairment in about 5 million American children today, mental illness makes up one-third of the disease seen in the adolescent population. No different than any other medical condition, mental illness can also be properly diagnosed, accurately treated and possibly cured. However, it is treated much differently in the American education system. While, physical education became mandated over 100 years ago in schools due to the health threats of “lifestyle-related” diseases, schools have yet to mandate a similar curriculum for mental health.

The Campaign

The campaign looks to inform young people of the importance of mental health and give them some strategies to fight against popular disorders. I will be visiting Osceola Mills Elementary School and will be presenting to Ms. Davidson’s 3rd and 4th grade physical education classes. With this audience, the goal is for them to have a basic understanding of what mental health is and things they can do to encourage good mental health. Since it is a gym class, I am going to incorporate both physical education and mental health education. I am going to focus on the similarities between physical illness and mental illness in my introduction, similar to the introduction from the sample Lesson Plan #1 on the Walk in Our Shoes campaign (http://walkinourshoes.org/content/Classroom_Lesson_Plans.pdf). After explaining how sometimes someone’s mind can get sick, I will transition into the activity that will allow the children to learn about things that are within their control and things that are not. (I am using ideas from the two images below and also ideas that I made up on my own). I hope this activity will encourage conversation between the students, with their teacher, as well as with their parents at home.

