

Showcasing Evidence Based Practices (EBP) in maaps member schools Interview Questions

The maaps EBP Committee is looking to learn about the EBPs that you use at your school. The EBP can be clinical or education based. Please answer the questions below regarding the EBP you wish to highlight.

Name of Person Interviewed: Brittini Taylor, M.Ed. Director of Education and Kara McDowell, Assistant Principal

Date: 6/1/2015

School: Latham School

EBP Showcased: Mindfulness

Type of EBP (clinical, educational, etc.): Educational/Residential

1. What issue or circumstances initially made you look for an EBP to better serve your student population?

Four years ago, Latham implemented Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) Mindfulness into their community. It began as an initiative to introduce and establish coping techniques to successfully start the school day. We found that the students had difficulty transitioning from their residence to breakfast, and then from breakfast to school. It appeared to cause increased stress and anxiety amongst the students, and we wanted to find a calming technique to prepare them for their structured day.

Why did you choose this EBP?

We chose this EBP to release the stress and anxiety that was caused surrounding transitions. We found that it is essential for the students to prepare for their day in a calming, structured environment. Mindfulness activities allow for the students to release tension and prepare for their educational tasks.

2. What made you choose this EBP instead of another one? Were you strongly considering another EBP?

The Director of Children's Services at the time of implementation identified a need for a strategic way to build and move forward in the current programming. With his clinical background, he conducted research into mindfulness and the most appropriate mindfulness techniques for our individuals. It was determined that DBT mindfulness was an effective approach as it "combines cognitive and behavioral therapy, incorporating methodologies from various practices including Eastern mindfulness techniques."

3. How was or is the implementation process?

Staff was initially trained by appropriate personnel on the DBT and mindfulness process over the course of 1 month. Once the training period was over, the educational, residential, and clinical components began implementing mindfulness into their daily activities. Educationally, mindfulness was used at the beginning of the day, to help the students learn independent coping techniques to help release tension and begin their days. As this progressed, students have been active participants in leading mindfulness exercises at the beginning of community meetings, classroom and "Brain Breaks" have been implemented prior to lunch. We found that with the anxiety with our population in regards to food, it was essential to incorporate such activities to relax before a very anxious part of the day. We have found that Brain Breaks are an effective way to changing or focusing the mental or physical state of the students. They help activate and energize the students. One of the student's favorite Brain Break

activities is “would you rather” questions (i.e. “Would you rather be 3 feet tall or 8 feet tall?” “Would you rather be a deep sea diver or an astronaut?”) These types of activities activate their brains, but can also be entertaining and fun.

4. Did you run into any challenges implementing this EBP?

Implementation of new curriculum does not always come easy. The biggest challenge that we faced was getting the students completely on board with the new program. Change is always difficult for our population of individuals. We had to teach, discuss, and practice, prior to full implementation. Once full implementation occurred, the students were motivated to participate in a variety of mindfulness activities. Now, the students are more motivated to run mindfulness exercises than ever before. The beginning of community meeting, and other community based functions typically begin with a mindfulness exercise led by a student.

5. How did you learn about this EBP?

The staff were trained by appropriate personnel in mindfulness. The teachers and residential ADL’s took a lead in identifying multiple mindfulness activities. The techniques are shared across departments to increase consistency.

6. Do you have any advice for another school potentially looking into this EBP or another one?

The advice we would give is to ensure that multiple mindfulness techniques are taught to the students. We have found that with ongoing teaching of new techniques, the students flourish in utilizing the independent coping mechanisms associated with mindfulness. Often times, staff will use mindfulness activities during debriefing opportunities to return the students back to baseline. Classrooms have created mindfulness binders to ensure that they always have a variety of activities.

If you have additional questions, please contact Theresa Melito, M.Ed. Director of Member Assistance and Development at tmelito@maaps.org or by phone at 781-909-5308.