

National Association for the Education
of Homeless Children & Youth

November 13, 2021
10:30 - 12:00PM

Hanover G & F
Atlanta Hyatt Regency

SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Impact of homelessness on mental wellbeing and
how we can support our youth.

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WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

Our agenda this morning

- Grounding practice
- Definitions, disclaimers & statistics
- Understanding stress, depression & anxiety
- SAMHSA's Trauma-informed framework
- Vulnerability & resilience factors for youth
- Liaison's role in supporting youth
- Self-care for Liaisons

WORKSHOP REMINDERS


While waiting for others to come in, here are some rules and reminders to keep in mind.



This topic can be heavy, so please take care of yourself throughout.



Turn off your phones/silent mode.



If you're joining us virtually, please put your questions in the chat and they will be answered.



ABOUT ME

I have more than 20 years as a social worker.

I've been a CASA and foster parent and have supported teens through emancipation.

I'm a NAEHCY Board member & active in local policymaking.

I'm a mental health caretaker for members of my family.

GROUNDING PRACTICE

GAAWO:

Gently Alert with your Attention Wide Open

Find a comfortable seat.

Create space in your body, whatever that looks & feels like for you.

Take your gaze about 6 feet in front of you and focus on a steady object. Look out a window if you have one nearby.

Keep your breath steady as you listen to my voice.

30%

of people experiencing homelessness are younger than age 24, according to HUD.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA)

4 of 5

children who are experiencing homelessness have been exposed to at least one serious violent event by age 12.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA)

Can go up to 85% when focusing on youth.

26%

or 1 in 4 people experiencing homelessness
in America's shelter system are dealing with
a serious mental illness.

National Coalition for the Homeless

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

a person's condition with regard to their psychological and emotional well-being.

- Affects how we think, feel, and act;
- Impacted by heredity, biology & environment;
- Includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being;
- Helps determine how we handle stress/relate to others/make healthy choices.

VOICES OF YOUTH



TAKING MENTAL HEALTH SERIOUSLY

Mental health should be respected, not feared. When someone shares a mental health diagnosis with you, believe them.

It's easy to dismiss a mental health diagnosis and focus on the person's behaviors, especially if they are causing disruption for others.

Try to avoid the use of the words "crazy" or "disturbed" when speaking about mental illness.





A PERSON IS MORE THAN THEIR MENTAL ILLNESS

As providers and advocates, it's vital that we remember that a mental illness does not define a person. They are more than their brain chemistry, what happened to them, or their current living situation. Remind them of this often...

HONOR OUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH & TRIGGERS

It's easy to deny or invalidate our own mental health challenges when those we serve seem to suffer more. It's not a competition.

By honoring our own mental health, we can show up for those we serve and be a positive model on how to persevere through difficulty.

Be cautious with self-disclosure and be aware of your own triggers around other's behaviors.



“THE HUMANITY WE ALL
SHARE IS MORE IMPORTANT
THAN THE MENTAL
ILLNESSES WE MAY NOT”

— Elyn R. Saks

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN WORKING WITH YOUTH



- Mental health is not static...it can change based on many varying factors, including age.
- Mental health challenges are often undiagnosed and may be expressed in a youth's behaviors.
- Shift "attention seeking behaviors" to "support seeking behaviors" and give them what they need.
- Seeking mental health support can be challenging as a youth. Provide many options for support.

BIOLOGY VS. ENVIRONMENT

Nature or Nurture? The truth is, these two go hand-in-hand.

Biology Is it nature?

Heredity, familial traits and childhood trauma can impact our nervous system and our mental health. Mental health issues can present in youth or develop later in life.

Environment Is it nurture?

Stress in our society, community or workplace can cause mental health challenges to develop or be expressed. Certainly homelessness or housing insecurity can trigger or exacerbate mental illness.

“WHAT MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS
IS MORE SUNLIGHT, MORE
CANDOR, AND MORE
UNASHAMED CONVERSATION.”

– Glenn Close

3 MAIN FACTORS THAT IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH

Stress, depression, and anxiety can all affect mental health and disrupt a person's routine.



Toxic Stress

Not all stress is "bad", but toxic stress can impact our mental wellbeing.

Experiencing homelessness for any duration of time can be stressful.



Depression

Beyond sadness, depression can impact how youth engage in services. It can look like "laziness" or "lack of engagement".



Anxiety

Beyond worry, anxiety can make it hard to focus on what is happening in the present moment. Hyper-vigilance and fear of uncertainty is a normal response to homelessness.

DEPRESSION

The most common depression diagnoses include major depressive disorder (MDD) and dysthymic disorder (DD).

Approximately 1 in 5 youth will have an episode of MDD by age 18

ANXIETY

The most common anxiety diagnoses in youth are separation anxiety disorder (SAD), social anxiety disorder (SOC), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), and specific phobia (SP)

An estimated 15% to 20% of youth in the US meet criteria for any anxiety disorder

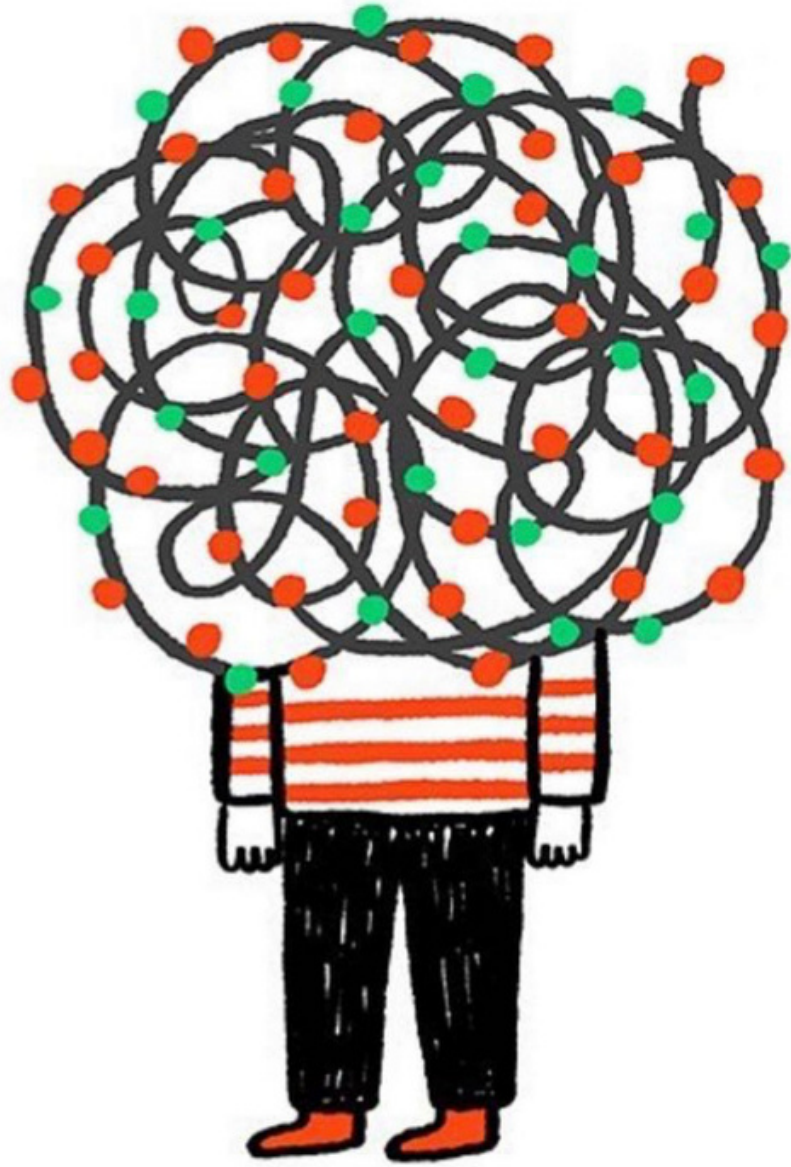
Anxiety and depression frequently co-occur both concurrently and sequentially in children and adolescents, and one often increases the risk of the other over time.

25% to 50% of youth with depression also meet criteria for an anxiety disorder, whereas only 10% to 15% of those with a primary anxiety disorder have a concurrent depressive disorder



ANXIETY

gemma
CORRELL



FESTIVE
ANXIETY

IMPACTS OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

Behavioral challenges.

Academic and attention challenges.

Lack of hygiene/cleanliness.

Substance experimentation and abuse.

Challenges with maintaining relationships

VULNERABILITY FACTORS FOR YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Parenting teens, abandoned/
unaccompanied youth, and refugee
youth are more vulnerable.

LGBTQI youth have higher rates of homelessness
mental health challenges...NOT because of who
they are but how others responds to them.

Unequal power relationships between
adolescents and adults/systems can cause
mental distress and increase vulnerability.

Lack of the maturity to make good, rational
decisions increase emotional vulnerability
during adolescence.

Substance abuse and mental illness is co-
occurring/co-morbid. Youth often self-medicate.

Other system involvement (foster care,
immigration, juvenile justice, etc) can increase
vulnerability.

WAYS WE CAN SUPPORT YOUTH AROUND VULNERABILITY FACTORS

Take your own self-care seriously so you can show up grounded, centered, regulated and ready to support youth, however they show up.

Providing safe, supportive, and welcoming environments for LGBTQI youth. Affirmation & Allyship are important.

Advocate for youth and encourage them to self-advocate to neutralize unequal power relationships.

Understand youth brain development and give lots of grace for the process.

Have honest conversations about substance use, seeking the deeper/root cause.

Teach youth coping skills to use in moments of distress & use your own coping skills to push back against systems that dehumanize our youth.

TRAUMA INFORMED FRAMEWORK

SAMHSA's six principles of trauma informed care

- Safety
- Trustworthiness & transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration & mutuality
- Empowerment & choice
- Cultural, historical & gender issues

RESILIENCE FACTORS OF YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- Expressions of spirituality and creativity: art, poetry, dance, etc.
- Self-identity through self-expression: clothing, hair, makeup, etc.
- Open to change and open-minded when it comes to supports.
- Informal social networks for survival: social media, peers, provider supports, etc.

SELF-CARE FOR LIAISONS

Working with individuals and families experiencing homelessness can be rewarding... AND helping clients with the challenges they face can also be extremely demanding. Tension often exists between feeling inspired by the work and feeling frustrated about the things outside of our control.

- Present-moment awareness: stay aware of what emotions come up for you when working with youth experiencing homelessness & find healthy ways to discharge those emotions.
- Self-Compassion: offer yourself plenty of space & grace when strong triggers come up.
- Ask for support & help when you need it. And take time away from the work when you can!

RESOURCE PAGE

National Coalition for the Homeless
NATIONALHOMELESS.ORG

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
6 [Guiding Principles To A Trauma-Informed Approach](#)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
www.nami.org

Courtney Cronley & Rosalind Evans (2017) Studies of resilience among youth experiencing homelessness: A systematic review, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 27:4, 291-310,

Garber, J., & Weersing, V. R. (2010). Comorbidity of Anxiety and Depression in Youth: Implications for Treatment and Prevention. *Clinical psychology : a publication of the Division of Clinical Psychology of the American Psychological Association*, 17(4), 293-306.

All info and data from the following sources. Check them out!

National Association for the Education
of Homeless Children & Youth

THANK YOU FOR
THE WORK YOU DO! ✦

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