COMFORTABLE CAFETERIA:
A Mental Health Promotion Program

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Overview

- Importance of mental health promotion
- Cafeteria and mental health
- Vision statement
- Principles of Comfortable Cafeteria
- Role of OT
- Implementation strategies
- Program outcomes
Every Moment Counts

Model Programs:

- Creating a Comfortable Cafeteria
- Refreshing Recess
- Embedded Classroom Mental Health Promotion Strategies
- Extracurricular Leisure Coaching

What is Mental Health?

"Mental health is a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity."

Promoting Mental Health at School

**ENJOYMENT**

- Contributes to mental health
- Happy and optimistic people are happier
- Leads to increased participation

Feeling good emotionally positively impacts academics, social life, and physical health.
Mental Health & the Cafeteria

Lunchtime is a time for students to:
- Enjoy their meal
- Enjoy time with peers and adults who care
ENJOYMENT!

Vision Statement:
Our school will provide pleasant and positive mealtimes so that students will enjoy eating food and socializing with peers and adults.

Comfortable Cafeteria Principles
A commitment to providing a positive mealtime experience.

1. Create a Positive Environment
2. Recess Before Lunch
3. Promote a Positive Social Climate
4. Nutritional Philosophy
Creating a Positive Environment

1. Adequate time to eat
2. Follow the division of responsibility
3. Food as neither reward nor punishment
4. Relax, socialize, and nourish bodies and mind
5. Inviting, comfortable, clean and safe environment
6. Adults sit with students

Recess Before Lunch: Take-Aways from the Research

- Improved behavior and relaxation
- Increased nutritional benefit
- Improved attentiveness in afternoon
- Significant decrease in discipline referrals

Promote a Positive Social Climate

1. A time for relaxation & socialization
2. Everyone is included
3. Use of Positive Behavioral Intervention Support
4. Bully-free atmosphere
Nutrition Statistics

1. Hungry children can't learn
2. Many students are under-nourished despite being over-fed
3. High numbers of overweight or obese children contributes to life-long health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease

1. Supportive mealtime environment
2. Learning laboratory for healthy eating habits and acceptable mealtime behaviors
3. Meals provide nutrients for growth and learning

Nutritional Philosophy

Who is Involved?
- Occupational Therapists
- Cafeteria supervisors
- Students
- Administration

Role of Occupational Therapist
- Provide support to cafeteria supervisors
- Analyze the sensory, motor, or emotional factors that might prevent enjoyable participation
- Modify activities and the environment to support successful participation in lunch
- Problem-solve and offer suggestions for promoting positive behavior
- Offer activities that foster social interaction
- Help ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities and prevent bullying
Implementation Strategies
10 Steps to Success

1. Know Your Stuff
2. Observe Lunchtime
3. Meet the Stakeholders
4. Develop an Action Plan
5. Principal Support
6. Sell the Program
7. Kick off the Program
8. Just do it!
9. Reinforce the Message
10. Do it Again

Program Outcomes
Replicated in 3 separate school districts and implemented by occupational therapists.

- Pretest-postest outcomes
- Supervisor survey
- Students survey
- Participants: 20 Cafeteria supervisors; 250 students in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades

Results
Student results: Those who had mid to lower levels of enjoyment of lunch, perception of friendliness of peers and supervisors, and enjoyment of mealtime conversations experienced statistically significant (p < .01) improvements in enjoyment and friendliness at the end of the program.
**RESULTS**

**Supervisor outcomes:** Supervisors felt better prepared to interact socially with children, promote positive mealtime conversations, successfully resolve conflict, and encourage healthy eating.

- Helps students enjoy their meal and social interaction
- Meets needs of students with and without disabilities
- Prepares cafeteria supervisors to promote friendship, healthy eating, social interaction, and inclusion.
- Prevents social isolation in students who struggle making friends

**Program Impacts**

**Resources**

www.everymomentcounts.org

www.schoolmentalhealth.org

Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland: http://csmh.umaryland.edu/
References


Ohio Department of Education. (2006). Guideline B. Schools provide a positive dining environment that encourages a pleasant eating experience. In Healthier schools: A brighter tomorrow. Evidence-based practices to jump start Ohio school wellness plan, 73-82.


Questions?

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