

Talking Points: School-Based Counseling

3 Key Messages:

Who is Integral Care? Integral Care supports adults and children living with mental illness, substance use disorder and intellectual and developmental disabilities in Travis County.

What is school-based counseling? Licensed therapists provide immediate and ongoing emotional support to students on elementary, middle and high school campuses. School-based counselors partner with teachers, school staff, administration and parents to improve the health and well-being of students.

Why is mental healthcare in school important? Mental health issues, like depression and anxiety, impact all of us, including the youngest in our community. 1 out of 5 children have a diagnosable mental health need and 50% of all mental illness are diagnosable by the age of 14. On-campus counseling provides immediate access to mental health care and is vital for early intervention and preventative care.

What is school-based counseling?

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Why is mental health care in school important?

- Research shows that
 - 1 out of 5 children have a diagnosable mental health need and
 - 50% of all mental illnesses are diagnosable by the age of 14.
- Mental health issues, like depression and anxiety, impact all of us, including the youngest in our community. Our children are also dealing with trauma.
 - Many kids have experienced trauma such as child abuse, divorce, immigration trauma, grief

- and loss, and witnessing domestic violence.
- Some kids are experiencing depression, anxiety and thoughts of self-harm.
- Other kids have externalizing behavior such as aggression, defiance or substance use.
- When youth are dealing with these challenges, it is hard to learn and thrive in school. Counseling and therapy can help.
- It's important to know that recovery from a mental health issue is possible.

What are the benefits of mental health care at school?

- School-based services reduce absences since counseling is available on campus. Students only miss one hour of school per week, generally an elective instead of a core class. When students leave for offsite appointments, they often don't come back.
- Services are available regardless of ability to pay.
- On-campus counseling supports parents as they don't have to miss work. Therapists can connect with parents over the phone and in person to ensure the parents' needs are met. Therapists will also meet with parents at their house or even at their office over their lunch break
- If there is a mental health crisis, the school-based counselor can provide immediate support. A therapist can help de-escalate the situation in a calming space.
- Parents are able to provide their children access to extra emotional support without having to leave work.
- Being on campus allows therapists to get the full picture of a student's mental health. It's not only an hour together. Our therapists receive feedback from teachers and administration and see students in the hallways.

What services does Integral Care provide on campuses?

- Integral Care believes that healthy families are the cornerstone of a strong community. Just like we need experts to build a house, Integral Care's experts make sure families have the skills and resources they need to thrive.

- Integral Care has school-based therapists at over 50 campuses in four school districts: Austin ISD, Manor ISD, Pflugerville ISD, and Del Valle ISD – serving all grade levels. We serve over 800 children per month in schools and have been providing on-campus counseling for 6 years.
- The therapist provides ongoing consistent one-on-one individual counseling as well as group and family counseling.
- In one-on-one therapy, therapists use talk therapy to support students. They work on building communication skills, coping, navigating relationships at home and school, and establishing healthy boundaries like good touch and bad touch.
- In Manor and Del Valle, we have a Crisis Prevention and Triage therapist who provides mental health training for school personnel. They also support students expressing suicidal ideation.
- Manor, Del Valle and Pflugerville have psychiatric services located on district grounds to make it more accessible for families
- Integral Care provides therapy over the summer as well as school holidays so there is continuous support. We have groups to teach skills such as problem solving, communication skills, and coping skills, and also take field trips in the community to practice these skills.

How do referrals work?

- A counselor, social worker, or nurse provides a referral that a student needs one-on-one ongoing therapy. This is based on feedback they receive from school personnel.
- The school-based therapist contacts the families and sets up an intake.
- The school-based therapist provides thorough assessments and then works with the student and family to develop a goal and plan for treatment.

How does Integral Care support school staff?

- In Del Valle and Manor, we have a position specifically designed to provide mental health trainings for teachers. We have offered trainings on suicide assessment, self-injury and trauma. We also provide Mental Health First Aid Training at no cost to school staff.

- In Manor, the therapists are starting a group for teachers to share their feelings and strategies about working with kids who have experienced trauma.
- Therapists collaborate with school personnel to ensure the student gets the support they need. Their presence helps destigmatize mental health issues and counseling. Many kids introduce their friends to the therapist if they see them in the hallway. We've had instances where kids learned about their friends having suicidal thoughts and brought their friend to their therapist's office and said "you can talk to her, she's a trustworthy person."
- Therapists provide lessons to students about how to handle stress, which inspires students to come for therapy.

Who is Integral Care?

Integral Care is the Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) and Local Intellectual and Developmental Disability Authority (LIDDA) for Travis County. Since 1967, our mission has remained the same: to provide accessible, high-quality mental health care and social services—at low or no cost—to individuals affected by mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and intellectual or developmental disabilities. We support people in achieving well-being and independence through compassionate care available 24/7.