

TMS TRENDS

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MIDDLE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM EDUCATES AND REDUCES STIGMA

Mental Health Matters, a middle school-based mental health program, is successfully educating students about mental illness and helping to reduce the associated stigma, according to a new study published in the *Journal of School Health*. The program's focus is on helping sixth graders learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of six major mental illnesses: attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, and stress disorders, major depression, bipolar disorders, eating disorders, and schizophrenia.

The program was developed by Ann Lippincott, Ph.D., an emeritus professor of education at the University of California (UCSB) Santa Barbara's Gevirtz Graduate School of Education.

"We would like to believe that by educating young people before stigma has reared its ugly head — knowing that stigma is the number one reason people do not get the help they need and deserve — our efforts are making the difference we were hoping they would make," said Lippincott.

The goal is to increase the students' understanding of mental illness, reduce the associated stigma, and share wellness practices.

But does the program actually work? Hannah Weisman, a doctoral student, designed a study to find out. She conducted the study with her graduate advisor, Dr. Maryam Kia-Keating, an associate professor in the Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology.

According to Kia-Keating, the researchers saw an increase in the students' knowledge of mental illness and a decrease in the stigma associated with it. In open-ended questions, for example, students wrote comments such as, "I used to think that people with mental health disorders are the ones to blame for their disorder; now I know that it is not the person's fault and they have not done anything wrong," and, "I used to think mental health disorders are contagious; now I know they are not."

According to the researchers, approximately 22 percent of children will develop a mental health disorder with severe impairment by the time they reach 18, and it's likely most adolescents will encounter a peer with a mental health disorder.

"Mental health issues are part of life," Kia-Keating continued. "I think the more that we're able to talk about mental health in an open way, have kids be able to have their questions answered, and not have it be a topic that's hidden from them, is essential."

The [August](#) edition of our TMS Trends newsletter included information about transcranial direct current stimulation (tDCS), a neuromodulation device approved in the EU for treatment of major depression. Here at the TMS Institute of Pennsylvania, we have partnered with Soterix Medical, manufacturer of the tDCS device, and are investigating the potential uses of this technology for neuropsychiatric disorders. The tDCS treatments are easily administered and very well tolerated. Unlike ECT, TMS and VNS (vagal nerve stimulation), however, tDCS has NOT been approved by the FDA. The use of tDCS in our practice is purely experimental and investigational at this time.

Happy Halloween
from **the TMS Institute of Pennsylvania!**