

Training courses for Teachers

Starting point

Teachers are taking classes of various age groups and often even in different types of schools. Pupils reach from primary school children to those at six form college who are often already over eighteen. Depending on the type of school a teacher might be looking after 30 up to 200 pupils. Thus the closeness of the relationship to the individual student varies quite strongly. Nevertheless teachers notice behavioural changes sooner than others. They might notice that a pupil ceases to actively take part in classes, that they appear to be run down or upset, that they miss classes or do not complete their homework or that they become aggressive. Even if teachers notice changes in a student, they often lack the resources to actively find out what the pupil might be dealing with at the time. Individual pupils who suddenly 'draw attention' are usually seen as a disturbance. To find out what is causing the disturbing behaviour means a lot of extra work for the teachers (talking to colleagues, to parents or to a school psychologist)

Teachers show the highest rate of stays in psychosomatic clinics. They enter early retirement more often than any other employment group. Depression is especially prevalent among teaching staff.

Known deficits

It is difficult for teachers to differentiate between individual reactions as normal adolescent development or as psychologically disturbed behaviour. Especially the differentiation between a normal disturbance, sad moods and a depression are not well understood. In cases where teachers suspect a psychological disorder they often feel helpless and out of control. This is partly because teachers are unsure of how to seek and handle a personal talk to one of their students, and partly because they do not know how to act if their suspicion proves to be true. They are often not aware of local help lines where they could look for further support (school psychologist, children and youth psychologists, crisis intervention lines, advice centres for children and adolescents, psychotherapists for children and adolescents, youth psychiatrists etc). A lot of uncertainty surrounds the subject of suicidality: how can it be included into the schools? Should it be addressed at all? Most teachers do not realise that a light approach to the subject is contra-productive if not even dangerous.

Aims of the training course

The aim of the course is to provide an overview of symptoms and treatment of depressive disorders. Teachers should be prepared for the case of having to deal with depressed children, how to approach them, how to talk to them and how to assess whether their suspicion is true. If in doubt teachers should be able to offer further support or to direct the pupils to appropriate help. We believe suicidality should not be addressed as an open topic in the classroom. It is more sensible to

hold a resource oriented talk, which educates pupils about the different help resources available. The subject of suicidality should only be addressed in individual cases.

Practical advice

Training courses for teaching staff are often a compulsory component for all staff members. They are usually within a certain time limit such as one day or one-evening courses. Thus, topics are not usually addressed very thoroughly unless there is a special focus on a certain item for the whole day. Training provided for teachers that they can join in their own time should be offered on late afternoons or evenings so that clashes with their teaching schedules can be avoided. The subject of suicide should not be the key issue rather the problems that might lead to a suicidal state.