

Thursday, October 10 - World Mental Health Day!

GBN Library

“A Personal Story and Panel Discussion on Mental Health”

In honor of World Mental Health Day, GBN’s Student Assistance Program (SAP) welcomed Haley Epstein, 2018 Deerfield High School graduate, and a panel of mental health experts from Compass Health Center, Glenview Youth Services and GBN. Haley opened the program by sharing her personal mental health story. A panel presentation, led by Bryan Simmon of Compass, followed, and the event concluded with a long question and answer period. It was a fantastic evening of honest, straight-forward conversation about mental health and emotional well being.

Haley’s story is one of two different people - “Happy Haley” and “Anxious, Depressed Haley.” She shared with the audience her struggles to talk about her thoughts and feelings when she was battling anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts. Haley often used other things to mask or excuse her anxiety (sore throat, diabetes complication, etc.). She was ashamed and didn’t want anyone to know that she was not the “Happy Haley” that everyone expected.

However, eventually, Haley did confide in friends and family, and she has since sought treatment for her anxiety and depression multiple times. She began to share her situation with her DHS dance team, her parents, a trusted teacher, and friends. Haley reminded all of us ***“It’s Okay Not To Be Okay.”*** She reminded us of the critical importance that removing the stigma of mental illness and talking openly about it. Only then can one seek and find help and learn the tools with which to navigate anxiety and depression. Haley urged us to “tell our stories and not to be afraid.”

A panel conversation followed. Bryan Simmon spoke about the signs of anxiety. He emphasized that there is a difference between stress and anxiety/depression. It’s not always easy to tell what is concerning and what may be normal teen “angst.” However, when a youth’s ***social, academic and family life are impacted*** by his or her mental well-being, there is cause for concern.

What can we do? Amongst other things we can:

1. Talk to our kids and normalize talk of feelings and emotional health. (Bryan and others on the panel reiterated what Haley had said about removing the stigma.)
2. Be curious about our kids, but don’t over react when they share.
3. Be aware of our reactions to what they say. Remain calm and non-judgmental. Just “sit” with them in their emotions rather than trying to “fix” or “change.”

The panel conversation continued and a therapist from Glenview Youth Services added a great tip to remember when talking with our kids.

SOY: “Some people...” “Other people....” “You might...”

These kinds of words allow us to refrain from judgement and stay curious and open with our kids. Conversation remains safe.

It was acknowledged that parenting a child who is struggling is hard.

We, as parents, must take care of ourselves. Remember that....

1. Failure is necessary to build resilience.
2. Limits *are* love and expectations for our children must be set.
3. Stick to the dialectic model (Two things happening simultaneously: “You can feel anxious **AND** go to school.”)
4. Seek support from school, community, professionals, coaches, etc.

Eric Etherton read questions submitted by audience members and the panel took turns responding and discussing each one. Glenbrook’s SAP team emphasized that GBN values mental health and believes in the whole child. There are a lot of in-house resources at the school as well as ongoing partnerships with outside clinicians and programs. They want all students and families to feel comfortable reaching out for help or information.

This is just a summary of what was an evening full of information and good conversation!