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Contact: Michele Bever, PhD, MPH Executive Director, SHDHD
1-877-238-7595 / michele.bever@southheartlandhealth.org

Area agencies share back to school tips for better mental health

“Going back to school can be stressful for students, parents and the whole family,” said Michele Bever, executive director of South Heartland District Health Department. “Everyone needs some time to make this transition,” she said.

The health department, Hastings Public Schools, and Mary Lanning Healthcare are working together to share back to school tips for better mental health. Dr. Bever said that mental health is one of five health priorities in the Community Health Improvement Plan that the health department and many other community partners are working on together in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties. Local agencies want parents to know that mental health issues are common and treatable, and that prevention is important.

Dr. Susan Lindblad, school psychologist for Hastings Public Schools, suggests organizing activities to reduce stress as school starts. “Mark your calendars. Put all the important dates in your calendar now, including open houses, parent-teacher conferences, athletic or music events, etc. This is especially important if you have children at multiple schools,” she said.

“Schedule physicals, eye appointments, dental checkups early, and share any concerns you may have with your medical provider,” Dr. Lindblad said.

“It’s also important to get your child started on a routine at least a week before school starts,” Lindblad said. “This would include setting study times, bedtimes, play times, and limiting screen time.”

Dr. Lindblad suggested that concerns about a student’s mental health be shared with teachers or counselors sooner rather than later. “Schools are a great place to get the conversation started,” she said.

She said that parents should watch for regressive behaviors, such as reverting to bedwetting, increased tantrums, or being excessively clingy to parents.

“Parents might also seek additional help if their child has frequent complaints of physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches, extreme mood changes, or significant changes in sleep or appetite,” Dr. Lindblad said.

Dr. Brindi Streufert, a psychologist and behavioral health consultant in two Mary Lanning Healthcare clinics, provided several tips for promoting complete family mental health.

“Getting a good night’s sleep, thirty minutes of moderate physical activity five days a week, limiting screen time and eating dinner as a family - without TV and electronics - are all ways to promote positive, whole family mental health,” said Dr. Streufert.

Dr. Bever said that just like with physical health, taking care of mental health concerns early can help prevent more serious issues later. “If you are concerned that someone you care about is experiencing symptoms of mental distress or mental illness, it is important to act. Start the conversation and seek help from a trusted individual. Remember there is nothing to be ashamed of and help is available,” she said.