

TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

Participants spoke about feeling like a number in the education system, being passed from one counsellor to the next without consideration of the individual. Within the context of family and community stressors, school and university further worsened mental health instead of being a source of expected support and growth. For many marginalized groups like young South Asian women (YSAW), the education system plays a great role in access to mental health care. Here are some tips to help inform your interactions with YSAW:

1 Safe Space

When a YSAW reaches out for help she is likely in crisis. Create a safe and inclusive space to listen, understand and provide resources for her and the family.

2 Collectivist community

YSAW are in the midst of trying to create space for individuality within a collectivist community. Learn about the meaning of community from the YSAW you are working with and understand how she is creating autonomy. This extends to the schooling environment where YSAW may come from families where they are unable to exercise choice and agency in decision making with school. Given the pressures from parents, the emphasis on grades and in a public way can exacerbate stress, ideals of failure and result in disappointment.

3 Discrimination

Enquire about multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced and impacts on mental and physical health, social exclusion/inclusion and integration. Examples include religion, gender, culture, age, country of origin, race, language, skin tone, status (e.g. permanent resident, refugee, international students).

4 South Asian Family

It can be difficult for YSAW to talk to parents and family members about their mental health and substance use, and subsequent impacts on their school life - but it is not black and white, some parents are more open than others. Parents with low mental health literacy tend to problematize school engagement rather than focus on the underlying mental health issue. For example parents might focus on delays with school, success with employment, relationships and marital prospects.

5 South Asian Culture

Living in a collectivist community can be stressful for YSAW due to being accountable to immediate family, friends and wider community. There can be pressure to achieve high grades, be successful and conform to cultural norms. Some of this pressure stems from parent's seeking validation for their own sacrifices as first generation immigrants to Canada.

6 History

Intergenerational trauma, multiple migrations and colonialism are important factors to integrate into work with YSAW. These can impact engagement, performance and attendance at school, and engagement in school based mental health supports.

7 Discussing mental health

YSAW want a culturally safe space in which to learn and explore the spectrum of mental health including suicidality, spiritual interpretations and holistic healing.

8 South Asian Mental Health Worker

Wherever possible provide YSAW with the choice to access a mental health worker of similar cultural, religious and gender identity.

9 Family Physician

A YSAW may not be able to provide a doctor's note from their registered doctor as they are often connected with the family and community. Inform the YSAW you are working with that they can see a doctor at a walk in centre outside of their neighbourhood.