



# **The Forgotten Children Prevention in school**

Vilnius, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2009

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# Prevention in school



Health is not a subject in most EU school systems like maths and geography

- European Network of Health Promoting Schools ENHPR (1997) - Schools for Health in Europe (2009)
- EU Health Strategy (2008-2013)

# Prevention in school



- The European pact on mental health and well-being - “Promotion of mental health and well-being of children and young people - making it happen” Stockholm, 29th - 30th September 2009
- Mind Matters Plus
- “Social and emotional learning” (SEL)
- “Skills for Life”(SFL)
- “Positive Youth development” (PYD)
- “Schools for Health in Europe Network” “SHE”

# Mental Health in Youth and Education, Consensus paper Luxembourg: European Communities

- Good mental health in childhood is a precondition for optimal psychological development, productive social relationships, effective learning, ability to care for oneself, good physical health and effective economic participation as adults. Health *education* and health *prevention* should be fully integrated into the education system. Jané-Llopis, E. & Braddick, F. (2008)



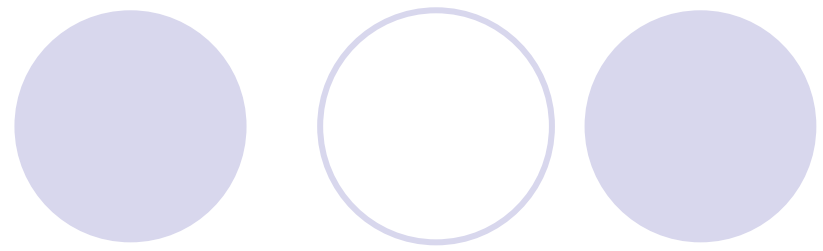
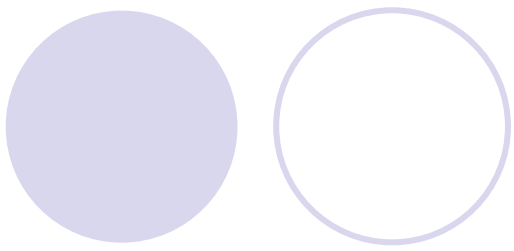
**29th- 30th September 2009,  
Stockholm**

Educational settings play a significant role in promoting the mental health and well-being of children and young people

Peter Paulus

# Children of parents with a mental illness

- Without problems
- With problems: known / unknown
- Parents with health illness too
- Families of ethnic minority
- Children sensitive to issues relating to sexuality, race and religion



- Very young (0-4)
- Young (4-10)
- Teenagers
- Adolescents

# Children of parents with a mental illness

Research and experience shows that a significant number of students of parents with mental health illness who experience difficulties at home are extremely *reluctant* to seek help or accept recognition of needs



# Friends, peer group

Even if students have not experienced mental illness, it is very likely that they know someone who has

# Statistics



Consider the statistics we can get an idea of just how widespread the effects of mental illness are in society in general, and among young people in particular:

- 1) Mental illness is second only to heart disease as the leading cause of disability in worldwide  
*(Global Burden of Disease – World Health Organization, World Bank, Harvard University, 1990)*
- 2) Mental health problems affect one in every five (and young) people at any given time

# Statistics



- 3) Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people aged 15-24. At least 90% of those who commit suicide have a diagnosable mental illness. Learning about mental illness and the importance of seeking treatment can save lives!
- 4) Fear of stigma and the resulting discrimination discourages individuals and their families from getting the help they need *(SAMHSA, 2004)*

# Statistics



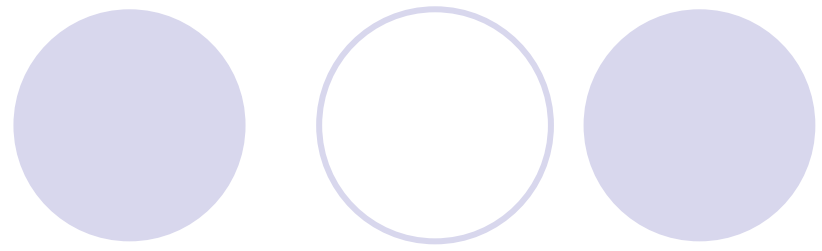
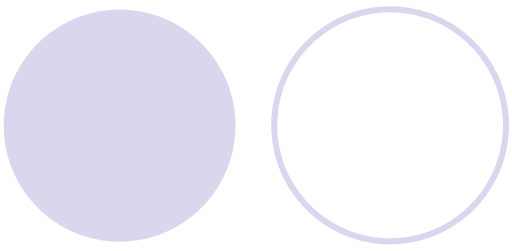
- 5) The first symptoms of a severe, chronic forms of mental illness (such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression and anxiety disorders) generally appear between the ages of 15 and 24 (*CMHA, 2003*)

# Children of parents with a mental illness

- Children need to be offered clear factual information about their parents' mental ill health to reduce the likelihood of increasing the child's anxiety. The internet increasingly provides a way for children and young people to find out about topics which carry a stigma or may be a source of embarrassment.

# Children of parents with a mental illness

- Children rely on their parents for practical and emotional support to grow up. But when a parent becomes mentally ill, that support changes.
- Although most parents go on looking after their children effectively, some find it difficult for a time to continue as before. Then, the whole family needs to be able to rely on services that are 'family minded'.



**What can schools do?**

A decorative graphic at the top of the slide consists of five circles. The first circle on the left is solid light purple and contains the word 'Prevention' in dark blue. The second circle is white with a light purple outline. The third circle is solid light purple. The fourth circle is white with a light purple outline. The fifth circle is solid light purple.

# Prevention

**Prevention** is a powerful tool in health promotion and a neglected area in EU health systems

# Prevention



- Establish Health Promotion team at school. This team should include representatives of school staff, parents, and students, and be assisted by a prevention worker from the collaborating health promoting agencies
- Write a policy with the roles and responsibilities of staff and students

# School staff need information and training

- Confidence in addressing family issues with parents
- Skills in communicating with children and young people about these issues
- Ability to challenge the stigma and barriers of mental illness



# Prevention

Provide a safe and supportive environment in which all students can maximize their learning and health development – “Safe school”

# Intervention



- Identify those students who are in particular need of assistance or support
- Remain accessible and responsive to students' needs
- Mentor training
- Peer support training
- Help students develop their abilities to *cope* with challenges and stress

# Intervention



- Integrate mental health professionals into the general school environment
- School psychologists, counselors, and social workers can provide teacher, peer and parent training, handouts and newsletter articles, classroom observations and feedback
- Establish a crisis response team

# Resilience

A decorative graphic at the top of the slide consists of five circles. The first circle on the left is solid light purple. The second circle is white with a light purple outline. The third circle is solid light purple. The fourth circle is white with a light purple outline. The fifth circle on the right is solid light purple.

- How is it that some children when faced with trauma events and adversity are able to develop in a harmonious and positive way, while everything would seem to predict the opposite?
- Our children needs skills necessary to cope with life's challenges
- **Building resilience** with a constructive bonds between the child and at least one adult at school who believes in his potential and who wholly accepts hem

# Building resilience



- A sense of belonging- a close bond with the classroom teacher or other significant adult is crucial
- Accomplishment- children need to know that they can accomplish goals through their actions

# Building resilience



- Adapting to change- routine is important to young children but equally important, is the ability to adapt to change
- Making a difference - children need to know that they can make a difference

# Follow up



- Monitoring a policy and the process
- Recognize the boundaries: knowing where professional boundaries lie and where and when to refer on
- Confidentiality: encourage students to have the confidence and trust to seek appropriate help and to identify needs
- Network of organizations (counseling service or health service)
- Books and information, Web-sites, Posters, Theater performance at schools
- SOS - telephones



# What children needs?

- The presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute
- Strong social support networks
- A committed mentor or other person from outside the family
- Positive school experiences

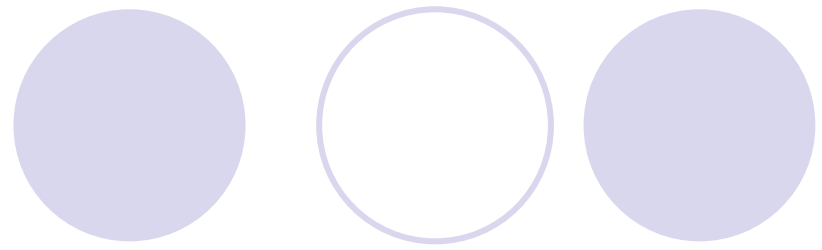
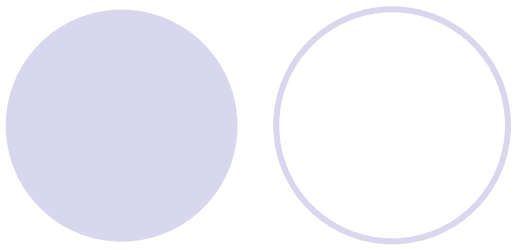
# Suggestions for teachers

- Talk about the signals that you see with a child
- Keep the contact with the parents intact
- Make a school a safety place for a child
- Take a time to explain to the child about health services and accompany him/her to them
- Treat each child with respect and dignity

# Suggestions for peers



- Keep contact with your friend
- Only listening is enough too
- Don't be afraid to say something even it could be wrong – attention is important
- If your friend talks about family situation, compliment him on it
- Try to do something for your friend – go out together
- Humor helps!



**Thank you for your attention**

