

Counselors



Physical health, psychological well-being and school performance are all connected. An analysis of the first National Survey of Children's Health published in the April 2007 *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* concluded that children with asthma, especially severe asthma, have higher rates of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder; diagnoses of depression, behavioral disorders, and learning disabilities; and missed school days. Counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other human services providers serve as an important resource to help students with asthma and their families to identify and address psychosocial stressors that impede the student's asthma therapy and success in school.

Action Checklist for Counselors

Counselors, psychologists, social workers, and human service providers serve an important function in facilitating communication among parents/guardians, students, school staff, and healthcare providers that enables them to focus together on the student's health, mental health, and social service needs. While asthma is a physical condition, psychological factors such as stress, anxiety and strong emotional reactions can bring on asthma symptoms. Additionally, students with asthma may feel tired, drowsy, irritable, or depressed due to sleep interruption or jittery or nervous if overmedicated, impeding their ability to concentrate and learn. They also may be embarrassed or angry about their asthma or fear they will die. Further, they may have low self-esteem and withdraw from friends and activities. Similarly, students with anaphylaxis may be disbelieved or teased by peers who do not face the same risk of a life-threatening systemic allergic reaction from certain foods (e.g., peanuts) or other items.

Parent/guardians, teachers, coaches, and other adults also face a host of challenges. While some parents/guardians may be concerned, anxious, or angry about their child's asthma or anaphylaxis, others may be dismissive or skeptical about the serious nature of the disease. They may be resentful or weary of being called away from work each time their child has an asthma episode. Teachers and coaches also may feel unprepared to cope with the student's needs or concerned about taking the student on a field trip where a school nurse will not be available.

Counselors help manage asthma and anaphylaxis in the school when they:

- Encourage parents/guardians, students, healthcare providers, and school nurses to participate in the development of Asthma Action Plans, Anaphylaxis Action Plans, and emergency care plans.
- Assist students to overcome any discomfort, embarrassment, or other challenges which make it difficult for them to take their prescribed medications or other helpful actions.
- Work closely with the school nurse, teachers, and staff members to support policies and procedures that help students with asthma and anaphylaxis participate fully in school each and every day. Be proactive.
- Help students and parents/guardians access community resources to obtain healthcare services, medications and supplies.
- Work with students and parents/guardians to help reduce or eliminate asthma and anaphylaxis triggers in the home and school environments.
- Refer children and their parents to outside counseling and support services when appropriate.
- Advocate for a comprehensive approach to treatment.