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A Recovery for All of Us: Mayor’s Office of Community Mental Health, NYC Department of Education, NYC Department of Health, The Jed Foundation, and Ogilvy Health launch “Let’s Talk NYC” campaign to support mental health of high school students

With students experiencing high level of mental health needs, new mental health training for teachers and school staff will begin this month

NEW YORK – Let’s Talk NYC, a new campaign to encourage high school students citywide to reach out to trained, trusted adults in their school communities to talk about mental health, and get support when they need it, was announced by the Mayor’s Office of Community Mental Health, NYC Department of Education, NYC Health Department, The Jed Foundation, and Ogilvy Health.

Beginning in May, Mental Health Awareness Month, the City is encouraging all high school teachers and staff to take new mental health training ahead of next school year to help them support student mental health in a time of serious need.

"Our young people need and deserve the warmest of welcomes as they return to the classroom. The 'Let's Talk' campaign will remind every student that their emotional well-being is a priority and it is okay to need help," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. "Now, teachers, cafeteria staff, administrators, coaches and other adults in the school community, who are already seen as trusted adults, will have the training and tools to serve as mental health allies. All this support will help our children emerge from this crisis stronger and healthier."

The Let's Talk NYC campaign - a partnership of the new Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health, the NYC Department of Education (DOE), the NYC Health Department (DOHMH), The Jed Foundation, and Ogilvy Health - will reach young people following a year of unimaginable stress. Many have experienced trauma, loss, uncertainty, and social isolation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic began, 30 percent of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless for more than two weeks at a time ([source](#)). The new training will help equip teachers and staff to have supportive conversations about mental health with students, identify student needs, connect students to services and resources, navigate the referral process, and also take care of their own mental health. Once they complete the training, teachers and staff will receive physical and digital badges so students know they’ve been trained. During the summer, the City will be encouraging teachers to take the training so that they are trained in time for the start of the school year in the fall.

The campaign has been developed and strengthened with student and school staff input. The 2018-2019 Chancellor’s Student Advisory Council first recommended a mental health awareness campaign complete with teacher and staff training and an accompanying badge. Through the pilot phase of the initiative, approximately 260 teachers and school staff have been trained and provided feedback.

Beginning this fall, posters and other media created by Ogilvy will encourage students to reach out to trained, trusted adults in their school.

“With so many students experiencing mental health challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, now is the time to equip the adults they trust – teachers, coaches, aides, and other school staff – with the skills they need to have conversations that can make a difference,” said **Susan Herman, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Community Mental Health**. “We’re grateful to our partners at the NYC Department of Education, the NYC Health Department, The Jed Foundation and Ogilvy Health for bringing this new mental health training to teachers and school staff - so we can work toward a City where every student, in every high school, has someone to talk to about what they’re going through and where they can find support.”

“We know that a strong recovery from this crisis begins when every student has a caring adult they can speak to and confide in when they are struggling,” said **Schools Chancellor Meisha Porter**. “Our incredible educators and school staff engage in these important conversations every day, and this training will provide them with even more tools for having supportive conversations, identifying student needs, and knowing when to refer a student to a mental health professional.”

"The pandemic has had impact on all of our mental health, but youth have experienced the COVID crisis in unique and profound ways," said **Health Commissioner Dr. Dave A. Chokshi**. "The Department of Health is proud to partner on this important campaign to address students' mental health, and help equip staff and teachers with the tools they need to support them."

"The Let's Talk NYC campaign is especially poignant this year as we continue to address the emotional toll of a global pandemic on students and teachers," said **John MacPhee, executive director and CEO of The Jed Foundation**. "We're thrilled to partner on this campaign that will better equip teachers and staff to meet both the mental health needs of their students as well as of themselves."

“With all the added pressures on our students during this last year or so, there has never been a more important time to find ways to help normalize the idea that reaching out for help is okay,” said **Kate Cronin, Global CEO, Ogilvy Health**. “This initiative offers important resources to students who might not otherwise have access to them. We’re so pleased Ogilvy Health could play a part in such a meaningful, and potentially life-changing, effort.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives in unimaginable ways that many New Yorkers simply do not know where to even begin with the coping process. The creation of Let’s Talk NYC is a thoughtful approach to helping our youth openly share their thoughts and emotions with the people that they trust within the spaces that they know and feel at ease. We recognize that recovery looks different for everyone, and there is no one-size fits all solution. Therefore it is crucial that we continue to find innovative ways to connect New Yorkers to the mental health support that they may not know they need,” said **Council Member Farah N. Louis, chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addictions**.

“When I was a teacher one of my students came to me because he was planning suicide. We spoke to an EMT and other first responders together, because I was the only one in the room he actually knew — that relationship made a huge difference in getting him the care he needed. The connection that teachers and school staff have with their students means that they are very often the ones encountering unmet mental health needs. But not knowing who to go to or how to best

support a student is the worst feeling you can face as a teacher, and it's terrifying when a child's life is on the line. This program is a desperately needed support for teachers their students," said **State Senator Jabari Brisport**.

"A key message to amplify during Mental Health Awareness Month is that nobody should go it alone, and you are not alone," said **Senator Roxanne J. Persaud**. "The Let's Talk NYC" campaign, which will consider youth mental health and encourage all high school teachers and staff to take new mental health training ahead of the next school year, is a step in the right direction. High school students will know that they have someone to talk to when support is needed. Thank you to the Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health, the NYC Department of Education (DOE), the NYC Health Department (DOHMH), The Jed Foundation, and Ogilvy Health for this initiative."

"Mental health concerns interfere with students' ability to learn, grow, and develop, and the mental health needs of our students has sky-rocketed since the beginning of the pandemic. Since students spend much of their time in educational settings, schools provide a unique opportunity to help equip school staff to identify and treat mental health conditions by reaching students where they already are. I look forward to working in partnership with the City to complement this initiative by ensuring that we also direct even more of the new State funding to hiring psychologists and social workers for every school whose primary responsibility is to care for the social and emotional well-being of our school communities," said **State Senator Robert Jackson**.

"As the Chair of the Assembly Subcommittee on Minority Mental Health, I am deeply committed to supporting mental health and well-being. I encourage high school teachers and staff to take mental health trainings and have brought forward the New York City Training and Comprehension of Trauma in Children (TACTIC) Act to support these efforts," said **Assemblymember Mathylde Frontus**, a longtime mental health professional and advocate. "I commend and thank the administration for launching the Let's Talk Campaign to help students get the help they need now more than ever after the next unimaginable events of the last year."

Mental health support is available for every NYC public school student. As we work toward a recovery for all of us, the City has announced [major expansions of mental health supports](#) in schools. Many students have difficulty talking about their mental health challenges, and having trusted, visibly-trained adults in their schools can help make them feel comfortable enough to ask for help. Teachers and school staff – who have also experienced high levels of stress and trauma throughout the COVID-19 pandemic - will also learn to better understand and take care of their own mental health needs through the training.

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