

# Mentally Preparing Students for Life

The school system needs to change. The way we see mental health needs to change. It is not only for the sorrowful and the broken. They teach us in health that each one affects the others and that we must make healthy decisions to ensure our overall well-being. So schools pump our brains with information we'll only use for the next test in an effort to exercise our brains. Send us to gym class to exercise our bodies. Give us outlets like clubs and art and music. Expect us to learn the rest of what we don't know. Coping skills, Regimens, Managing ourselves, Social skills, Balancing school responsibilities with family responsibilities with social responsibilities with the expectations. So many expectations. And the pressure is maddening. And when we do go mad from it we know where we'll be sent. Straight to a therapist who will give us a diagnosis, tell us all what is wrong with us before they know us and expect us to fix it all while the pressure is still building. They only help us if we scream for it. Only feed us when they see us starving.

In my first week of school I wore a face mask. The year was 2018-2019 when I showed up in a medical mask and didn't speak much. They sent me to a therapist in the second week where I got bombarded with questions. The words of the therapist became the voice in my head. I quickly found myself looking for answers where there were none. Chastising myself for being who I was. Comparing myself to my peers. The thoughts in my head grew meaner till I hated myself and still the questions kept coming. And every so often the therapist would come to my class to get me. I would stand and walk as I felt all the kids stare because I was going with the person who fixes broken people. Someone they'd never have to see. Someone they'd never let themselves see lest they become another broken person. Be made to walk out the class and into the room, far from the rest of the school, where the therapist will help give us more questions and reasons as to why we were wrong. Quick to give us problems and slow to give us solutions.

But what if they gave us the answers before we face the problems? Why don't they prepare us for all the "bad times"? We need to know, more than the numbers of protons in any given atom, what to do to take care of ourselves fully. Mentally, emotionally, and physically. We need a class that teaches us what we feel is never bad or wrong. Teaches us to end the sentence "I feel..." with an emotion. Teaches us not to merely cope and bottle up but to let it out. A class where it's ok to cry because everyone understands how hard it is. Where we learn about love languages, life skills, to connect with ourselves. Every class starts in silence and is run by someone who not only knows but understands because they've been where you are. Everyone in the class understands because we teach them that empathy is not the same as feeling sorry for someone.

Art and music and clubs are great. But that's just trying to save babies flowing down a river. We need to solve this at the source. I have spent my whole life in therapy, since further back than I can remember, and it wasn't until I started researching on my own that I was able to find ways that helped me. That's because I knew myself and my struggles better than anyone. I wasn't a stranger asking for my life story on the first meeting. I had lived it and knew exactly how I wanted to change it. If each student had the knowledge they could apply it and practice it with themselves. Truly go at their own pace without having to worry about disappointing anyone. With proper teaching they'd even be able to help those around them. Friends who trust and confide in them can get proper advice and expand their own knowledge in the process. The way we see mental health in schools needs to change. We all need therapy and have the potential to be our own therapists. We can learn to understand what it is that we need, learn to not judge ourselves for our pre-assumed flaws, and grow confidence in knowing that we and others can rely on us. Just teach us because we have the capacity to be great.