



To: Teachers

Topic: **How to identify a psychological need among learners**

Message Objective(s): To build capacity for teachers to identify learners requiring psychosocial needs.

**Message:** As learners return to school this week after forced closure due to the ravaging pandemic, educators will be wondering what negative impact the pandemic has had on the children. It is with this in mind that I decided to write about the signs educators need to look out for in learners as to identify those that require psychosocial support. While there are no set indicators or signs for those learners requiring psychosocial support, educators should:

- a) pay attention to certain signs or symptoms among learners
- b) investigate the issue in discussion with the learner
- c) refer to qualified personnel if they are not able to assist

The following will assist educators to identify and refer learners for appropriate support:

- 1) **Withdrawn/not engaging with regular friends:** Learners who suddenly withdraw from their friends and isolate might have underlying issues requiring psychosocial support.
- 2) **Anxious, panic attacks:** Learners who get panic attacks or those that are overly anxious might be crying out for help.
- 3) **Mood swings:** Elation, depression, being nervous or suspicious, extreme sensitivity or irritability and suicidal language are clear signs of underlying issues that need further interrogation by the educator.
- 4) **Behaviours/actions in class:** Being overly argumentative, physically threatening other learners, overly talkative, disruptive, uncontrolled, or inappropriate behaviour in class and disrespect are signs that all is not well with the learner.
- 5) **Unusual behaviours:** Extroverts become suddenly introverts; behaviours not normally associated with the learners.
- 6) **Marks on the body:** Bruises or any marks on the body might indicate abuse
- 7) **Appearance:** Unkempt, poor hygiene or torn clothing are signs of neglect
- 8) **Falling asleep during lessons or fatigue:** Falling asleep during the day is fatigue or sign that the learner is not getting enough sleep or is being abused
- 9) **Absenteeism:** Unusual absenteeism must be investigated as many times as possible it reveals underlying issues at home.
- 10) **Crying easily:** Learners might have lost someone close and are struggling to deal with the loss or it might be cases of abuse. Investigating issue further will reveal the cause.

Educators are not being called to be psychologists and diagnose learners but just to be alert to the signs, investigate and make referrals to appropriate personnel within the education system or sister departments.

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References: Basic Psychosocial Skills: A COVID-19 Responder's Guide, Psychosocial Support: A model for South African Schools.