

Coping in the classroom – an occupational health risk for teachers, a qualitative study – Jill Joyce

Objectives

Stress is consistently reported to be the main cause of work-related illness in the education sector. Ensuring that students with specific health, behavioural or emotional needs are included in activities can be particularly challenging for teachers. This study explored what aspects of coping in the classroom with these issues could be a source of stress for teachers and what more could be done to provide them with support and resources?

Method

These questions were considered in focus group discussions with groups of teachers and support staff in schools and colleges in England (n = 36). A semi-structured format was chosen for the focus groups, consisting of case studies and questions. This helped participants share their experiences and provided a flexible approach to guide the discussion.

Results

Transcripts from the groups were qualitatively analysed and issues causing stress emerging from the data included:

- The conflict of using personalised teaching, with the need to acknowledge different learning styles and include more kinaesthetic learning but encountering lack of understanding when trying to implement new approaches.
- Difficulties faced by newly qualified teachers, and the need to promote resilience.
- Administrative delays in getting the necessary services.
- The school family interface, which included issues about children as carers, drug and alcohol abuse, risk averse parents and lack of communication between children and their families.
- Bullying and fighting fuelled by “Face book”
- Violence faced by teachers and sometimes uncertainty about how to intervene.
- Problems faced by some teachers in coping, particularly when dealing with vulnerable families.
- Fear that asking for help in coping would be seen as a sign of weakness
- Bureaucracy and paper work associated with risk assessment, not only for school trips but within the school.

Particular stressors identified in colleges included:

- Disruption from students using mobile phones during the class or wandering around during lessons or sitting in corridors
- Mental health issues (caused or exacerbated by alcohol, drugs and pressures from home)

- Anger management issues and a lack of respect:
- Conflict between community groups filtered into the college

Conclusion

Resources to help teaching staff cope with those challenges vary between different schools and colleges. There is a lot of information available but the mechanism for communicating it to teachers could be improved.

Different attitudes to staff wellbeing and a lack of guidance on how to cope with different situations can be a cause of stress among teaching staff.

An accessible resource would be useful in providing guidance for teaching staff in coping with the needs of these students.

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Von: Jill Joyce [mailto:Jill.Joyce@iosh.co.uk]

Gesendet: Freitag, 18. Juli 2014 17:22

An: Bollmann, Ulrike

Betreff: RE: Clarification on group work

Hi Ulrike

Thanks for the clarification. Actually I am just going through my abstract and booklet at the moment – pulling out the community issues – i.e.

- the school-family interface, which includes issues about children as carers, drug and alcohol abuse at home and in the area near the school or in the school playground,
- risk-averse parents (children are not allowed to get wet, play in the snow, etc)
- lack of communication between children and their families
- bullying and fighting fuelled by 'Facebook'
- violence faced by teachers (from students and parents) and sometimes uncertainty about how to intervene
- problems faced by some teachers in coping, particularly when dealing with vulnerable and dysfunctional families
- fear that asking for help in coping would be seen as a sign of weakness

Kind regards

Jill