

FSISD and Texas Tech University Health Science Center Helping Kids

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Today's children and adolescents deal with an array of psychological and emotional stresses that keep them from learning, developing and achieving at their full potential. The issues are not all dealing with COVID or the effects of social isolation or the learning loss that our children are experiencing and teachers are trying to help students recover from. COVID did not start the rise in our children and adolescents needing additional psychological and emotional support, but it did make the problems worse. However, COVID and school safety concerns have also put a spotlight on the need to get these kids more help and support.

Depression, anxiety, ADHD, PTSD, self-harming behavior, stress, school safety concerns, increased crime, behavior issues, suspensions, truancy, drugs, internet addiction, academic pressures, failing to make academic progress, psychiatric problems... are all being experienced by many of today's children and adolescents. All of that doesn't include the pressures of just being a teenager, such as anxiety dealing with parents, teachers, friends, girlfriends/boyfriends, alcohol, bullies, grades... that most of us adults struggled with as well during our school age years.

The Fort Stockton ISD (FSISD) and Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center – El Paso (TTUHSC-EP) have agreed to form a partnership to help support the psychological needs of children and adolescents enrolled in the Fort Stockton ISD. On Monday, December 12, 2022, the FSISD School Board gave its approval to a joint (MOU) agreement with TTUHSC-EP (and it's TCHAT program). A member of each school's counseling staff has been trained in the program and now students, parents and the Panther community are being informed of the program.

The TCHAT program focuses on early intervention. Currently, 50 percent of all mental health conditions manifest by age 14 and 75 percent of lifetime cases are presented by young adulthood. With early detection and intervention plus appropriate treatment, the result can be a well-functioning adult and productive member of society.

TCHAT is grant funded through the State of Texas. It was created by the 86th Texas Legislature as part of SB 11 in response to school shootings and high adolescent suicide rates.

TTUHSC - El Paso serves a geographic area covering 16 counties, including all of Far West Texas from El Paso County east to Ward County (Monahans); to Crockett County (Ozona); and Southeast to Maverick County (South of Del Rio). The State of Texas is divided up geographically into 12 regions served by the State of Texas' system of medical schools. Because of the huge service area of TCHAT all sessions are conducted virtually.

TCHAT services are FREE, and participation is VOLUNTARY. A TCHAT senior mental health clinician and psychiatrist will conduct the initial evaluation. After the initial evaluation, 11 additional sessions may be available (12 sessions total), if needed and the student is eligible for the services. Families are allowed two cancellations and/or no-shows to the appointments, any more will result in discharge from the program. Referrals to other existing community programs will be provided upon program completion, only if needed. A senior mental health clinician will assist with the referral process and/or will provide necessary resources for continuity of care.

Parents, teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, medical personnel, and even the students themselves who feel that a student is struggling and needs help can contact their School Counselor. The School Counselors serve as the point of contact for referring students for services. The student's parent/guardian is then contacted and must authorize consent for evaluation prior to any initial appointment. Once that consent is given, and ONLY after it is given, are the staff at TTUHSC-EP given any information on the student by FSISD personnel. The information given will include IEP/ARD or 504 records, child's current grades, disciplinary history (if any), and attendance record. The TCHAT Clinical Director and/or Medical Director will determine if the student is eligible for services.

Students NOT eligible for TCHAT services include: 1) When a parent/guardian declines to sign the authorization consent for TCHAT services; 2) When a child/adolescent previously participated in the TCHAT program; 3) When a child/adolescent is already receiving treatment from a therapist/psychiatrist in the community; and when a child/adolescent is actively suicidal. When an individual is actively suicidal, MHMR and law enforcement should be contacted immediately.

Neither FSISD, nor the TCHAT program can cover the costs of medications (if prescribed by a psychiatrist). If a student is referred to outpatient therapy upon completion of the TCHAT program, neither FSISD, nor TCHAT will cover the costs for outpatient therapy.

The parent/guardian must be present at the first session to gather family history. For children under age 7, parental involvement in the sessions is strongly encouraged at all times. For each additional session with children above age 7, parents will need to briefly "check in" over the phone. The "check in" could be conducted at a different time from the child, to accommodate the parent's schedule.

The TCHAT program employs Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists (MD or DO); Licensed Psychologists (PhD or PsyD); Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC); Residents & Fellows (physicians, MD or DO, in training supervised by fully licensed psychiatrists); Program Coordinators; and Medical Assistants.

The therapeutic relationship between a therapist and the client contains an abundance of confidential information. This means that it cannot be shared without the consent of the client or his/her legal guardian.