

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear criteria and procedures for providing mental health therapy services within the school setting. The goal is to ensure that students receive appropriate support while maintaining alignment with best practices, legal requirements, and the school's resources and scope of responsibility.

1. Guiding Principles

- The school aims to support students' social-emotional well-being while recognizing that intensive mental health therapy is often best provided in clinical or community settings.
- School-based therapy services will be offered only when appropriate criteria are met and when external services are not reasonably accessible to the student or family.
- Students with general skill deficits or mild social-emotional struggles will receive non-clinical, skill-building interventions rather than mental health therapy.

2. Definitions

- **Mental Health Therapy:** A structured, clinically-based intervention requiring assessment, treatment planning, and documentation, delivered by a licensed mental health professional.
- **Skill-Building Services:** Counseling or group support focused on teaching coping skills, problem-solving, or social-emotional learning, delivered by school staff or counselors, not requiring a diagnosis or clinical treatment plan.
- **Referral:** The process of recommending and connecting families with outside mental health providers for therapy or specialized treatment.

3. Criteria for School-Based Mental Health Therapy

School-based mental health therapy may be provided only if all the following conditions are met:

1. **Mental Health Diagnosis or Clinical Criteria:**
 - Student demonstrates symptoms consistent with a diagnosable mental health condition (e.g., anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, trauma-related disorders, adjustment disorders, behavioral/emotional disorders).
 - Symptoms significantly impact the student's ability to function in the school setting.
 - A licensed provider or school psychologist confirms the need for therapeutic intervention through discussion with parent/caregiver or referral documentation.

Procedure 340 - School-Based Mental Health Services (cont.)

2. Need for a Treatment Plan:
 - a. Treatment requires formal goals, evidence-based interventions, and progress monitoring.
 - b. Parent/guardian consent is obtained for all mental health therapy services in accordance with the Utah State Board of Education requirements.
3. Barriers to Outside Access:
 - a. Family demonstrates financial, insurance, transportation, or other barriers preventing reasonable access to community mental health providers.

4. Referral to Outside Providers

Students will be referred to outside mental health providers when:

- Intensive treatment, complex family therapy, or long-term therapy is indicated beyond the scope of school-based services.
- Crisis stabilization, psychiatric evaluation, or specialized treatment (e.g., for eating disorders, substance use, or severe mental illness) is needed.
- The family has access to external providers through insurance, community resources, or other means.

5. Skill-Building Services (Non-Therapy Supports)

Students who do not meet the criteria for mental health therapy may receive skill-building interventions, including:

- Social-emotional learning groups
- Coping skills or emotional regulation groups
- Short-term counseling focused on problem-solving and resilience
- Behavioral coaching or check-ins

These services do not require mental health assessment, diagnosis, or treatment plan and are designed to help students build competencies, not to treat mental illness. Parent/guardian consent is obtained for all skill-building counseling services in accordance with the Utah State Board of Education requirements.

6. Documentation and Confidentiality

- Therapy services will include treatment plans, progress notes, and consent forms in compliance with HIPAA/FERPA as applicable.
- Skill-building services will be documented in accordance with the Utah State Board of Education.

7. Review and Oversight

Procedure 340 - School-Based Mental Health Services (cont.)

- School-based therapy services are designed to be short-term, solution-focused interventions, not long-term or intensive treatment.
 - Limited duration: typically lasting 6-12 sessions
 - Goal oriented: focused on setting and achieving specific goals rather than an in-depth exploration of the student's entire history or an in-depth treatment of a chronic mental health concern
 - Focused on the present: emphasizing the "here and now", focusing on the school environment, and focused on seeking solutions to current problems
- School mental health service providers will not engage in custody evaluations, parental mediation, or any role in advising on legal family disputes. The focus of all interventions will be on supporting the student's well-being and adjustment, not resolving conflicts between parents/caregivers.
- The school mental health team will review student needs regularly to ensure appropriate service delivery and referrals.
- Policies will be reviewed annually and updated as needed to reflect best practices and available resources.