

Episode 50 - From a Counsellor's Perspective - Cathy

#050 - In this episode we meet Cathy Banks, senior counsellor at National Association of Loss and Grief (NALAG) in Dubbo, NSW. She shares with us her knowledge, experience, strategies and resources, for teachers (or anyone really) to use in their classrooms. These resources will help not only the kids who need support emotionally, but all the kids in our classroom. There are some great takeaways in this episode and simple things we can put into action. It is also comforting to know that Cathy thinks teachers are doing a fantastic job and are the unsung heroes of today!

Cathy is the senior counsellor for National Association for Loss and Grief (NALAG) in Dubbo, NSW and is a qualified counsellor and psychotherapist. She grew up in Dubbo, went away to university in Bathurst (called Mitchell College back then) and took a long time to come back to Dubbo. Cathy later studied in Sydney with a graduate diploma in counselling and psychotherapy. She has worked in schools as well as private practice. Cathy spent time in Dubai before starting work at NALAG in 2020.

Common issues that Cathy has found in kids recently are anxiety and depression, a loss in children's lives such as separation, divorce or death of a significant other. Cathy loves working with children and finds it so rewarding. Kids have taught Cathy that they are flexible, resilient and adaptable.

Cathy thinks anxiety and depression are on the rise due to multiple facets. They include things like, we know more about it so it's on our radar, we give kids a more wonderful life so they are not used to adversity, people are more familiar with symptoms and triggers, and social media.

In previous years there was a focus on building a high self esteem in students, and Cathy thinks that maybe it was a disservice when it should have been more on working through the challenge and overcoming adversity. Researcher, Angela Duckworth talks about the idea of grit. Cathy prefers this way of working with kids, this idea of improving and working through the challenge. We need to be building grit rather than self esteem.

Cathy is seeing higher anxiety, depression and suicide ideation since COVID. Cathy thinks this is because of not knowing what is going to happen and the loss of control. We need to understand that this situation is temporary. Cathy is concerned for the teens in this space but there is lots of support available.

Strategies teachers can use

- Continue to model calmness and acceptance
- Growth mindset especially the work with Carol Drake
- Failure is just a way to learn
- Focus on teaching self regulation by starting with emotional intelligence

Other resources

- Use the school counsellor - using Sandplay as a strategy
- Meditation and mindfulness - Smiling Mind app
- Websites like Beyond Blue, Kids Helpline, Black Dog Institute
- maps.anxietycanada.com

Anxiety should be managed like any other medical condition such as asthma. If you have asthma, you have an asthma management plan, if you have anxiety you also should have an anxiety management plan. The plan could be working through their anxiety by breathing, grounding exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation.

Cathy wants to let teachers know that they are significant in a student's life and they are doing a wonderful job in such a meaningful job.

The future of kids' mental health in general looks bright. Cathy does wonder in the interim what long term impact COVID will have but she keeps coming back to how kids have an amazing ability to bounce back. They also have support organisations like NALAG to help them. All they need to do is reach out.