

# Your Child's



# Mental Health

## Information for Elementary Parents

Mental health refers to social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Just as you look after your child's physical health, it's important to support your child's mental health as well.

### Ways to support your child's mental health

**Make sure your child gets enough sleep.** The amount of sleep a child gets impacts their mood. Make sure your child gets 9–11 hours of sleep.

**Encourage physical activity.** Physical activity improves both physical and mental health. Look for fun ways to integrate physical activity into your child's daily routine.

**Have calming routines.** A warm bath, bedtime stories, or listening to calming music are some good ways to help your child wind down and relax.

**Teach gratitude.** Help your child recognize things in their everyday life to be thankful for.

**Help others.** Helping others has been shown to reduce stress and improve mental health. Donate books and toys to children in need, or rake a neighbor's leaves. Give your child ample opportunity to develop a giving spirit.

**Eat healthy.** Food fuels the body's health, including the brain. Research shows that nutrients found in healthy foods like fish, fruits, and vegetables can improve brain function and mental health.

## Communication is key

Regularly talking with your child is the best way to check in on their mental health.

**Timing is important.** Be available to listen when your child wants to talk. Also look for times when your child is most likely to be open to conversation, such as right after school or before going to bed.

**Recognize the importance of nonverbal communication.** Children can't always articulate what they need you to know. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to body language, moods, eating and sleeping patterns, physical appearance, and school performance. These can be good indicators of how things are going at school and with friends.

**Offer support.** When feeling down or upset, a hug or a few words of encouragement may be all your child needs. However, if you have concerns or are seeing the following, talk to your child gently and calmly about how they're feeling and what you can do to help.

### Things to watch out for:

- ▶ lack of energy
- ▶ prolonged sadness
- ▶ loss of interest in activities or hobbies
- ▶ outbursts, anger, and/or irritability
- ▶ difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- ▶ frequent complaints of illness
- ▶ extreme clinginess
- ▶ changes in academic performance
- ▶ changes in eating habits
- ▶ avoiding school

If you need help, talk to your pediatrician or to a mental health professional.

For more information on mental health, watch this quick video.

