



All About Mental Health

Information for Elementary Parents

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

Support your child's mental health

Make sure your child gets enough sleep.

The amount of sleep a child gets impacts their mood and attitude. Make sure your child gets 9–11 hours of sleep a night.

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 improve mental health. Donate books and toys or shovel snow for a neighbor. 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 foods like vegetables, fruits, fish, and nuts can improve brain function and mental health.



Coping with Stress

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Stress is the body's reaction to change, demands, and difficult situations. While we tend to think of stress as something teens and adults deal with, it's not uncommon for elementary children to experience stress. Helping your child develop healthy ways to cope with stress will benefit them now, and for years to come.

Signs of stress in children

When it comes to your child's mental health, keeping the lines of communication open is crucial. However, children aren't always able to verbalize how they feel, which is why it's important to pay attention to nonverbal signs like the ones below.

Here are some common signs of stress to watch for in your child.

- ▶ emotional outbursts and irritability that go beyond what is normal for your child
- ▶ an increase in headaches and/or stomachaches, and/or a change in appetite
- ▶ trouble falling or staying asleep, or a sudden onset of nightmares
- ▶ problems at school, such as difficulty focusing, a drop in grades, discipline issues, and trouble with friends
- ▶ a desire to spend more time alone
- ▶ an increase in defiant behavior



Managing Anxiety

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Anxiety doesn't just affect teens and adults. Children can experience anxiety too, and it can have similar negative effects on their mental health and wellness. Here's how to identify anxiety in your child, and how you can help.

Types of anxiety in children

It is normal for children to have fears and worries. While these fears and worries are generally mild and manageable, they can be severe enough to interfere with daily life.

These are some of the types of anxiety that children commonly experience.

Separation anxiety – fear of being separated from a loved one, usually a parent

Social anxiety – being very uncomfortable in social situations, and afraid of being embarrassed, ridiculed, or judged by others

General anxiety – worrying excessively about everyday things, and being preoccupied with what *could* happen

Panic attacks – an intense fear that comes on suddenly and causes physical symptoms, such as a rapid heart rate, trouble breathing, dizziness, shaking, and sweating

Phobias – an extreme fear of a person, place, thing, or situation



Building Self-Esteem

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Self-esteem is the perception of one's worth. Students who have good self-esteem feel liked and accepted. They have the confidence to try new things, and they are better able to cope with setbacks. Having good self-esteem helps students succeed both in and out of the classroom.

Ways to help build self-esteem

Encourage new experiences. Whether it's trying a new sport or learning how to use a camera, allowing your child to try different things and conquer new challenges will help boost their self-esteem.

Delegate responsibility. Give your child age-appropriate household tasks, such as taking out the trash, helping put away laundry, taking care of a pet, or making their bed each day. Make sure that tasks are completed, and praise your child for their effort. Conquering even simple tasks can lead to big gains in self-confidence.

Demonstrate perseverance. You are your child's most important role model, and having your child see you overcome adversity and achieve personal goals is invaluable.

Praise wisely. Praise is the most meaningful when it has been earned. Boost your child's self-esteem by praising them for good effort, hard work, and good behavior.



Calming Techniques

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Anger, stress, fear, and worry are complicated emotions for children, and calming techniques can help them recenter and relax.

Here are some tips on helping your child cope with these complex feelings, and some calming techniques you can try at home.

Validate your child's emotions

The first step to helping your child manage their emotions is to acknowledge and validate them.

Be accepting of negative emotions. Some children believe that negative emotions are unacceptable, so they let these emotions build up inside until they erupt and are hard to control. Explain that it's normal to have a range of both happy *and* sad feelings, and encourage your child to notice and acknowledge them.

Label emotions. Encourage your child to label their emotions—both positive and negative. For example, *"I'm upset because I don't understand how to do this math problem."* When you notice that your child is struggling, ask them to describe, in their own words, what they are feeling.

Don't minimize emotions. Show your child that you understand how they're feeling and that you want to help, even if whatever your child is upset about seems like a small thing to you.



Supporting Mental Health

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Your child's mental health is just as important as their physical health. Here are ten ways you can help your child protect, improve, and maintain their mental health.

1. Love your child unconditionally.

In order for your child to feel secure and accepted, they need to know that your love doesn't depend on good behavior or accomplishments. Regularly tell your child that you love them. This is especially important when things are hard and your child is not at their best.

2. Nurture your child's confidence.

Encourage your child to try new activities and master new skills. Give them opportunities to show you how capable they are, and help them learn from the mistakes they make.

3. Limit time on electronics.

While some TV shows and video games can be educational and beneficial, children need physical activity and play in order for their brains to make crucial, healthy connections.

4. Teach calming techniques.

It's helpful for children to know how to calm themselves when they are upset, angry, or worried. For a few simple calming techniques, watch this short video.



VIDEO