

# HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH

1 in 7 young people experience mental health problems. Parent's love and support has a direct and positive impact on a child's mental health. Here are some ways you can promote the mental health and well-being of your child:



## Be present

Giving your child your full, undivided attention at times throughout the week builds a healthy foundation where your child knows that you are in tune with their needs and always available if they need help. Try devoting 5-10 minutes to device free communication, where you ask about their day, and share yours. You might do this over dinner time, on the drive home from school, or share high and low points of your days with each other before bedtime.



## Offer a conversation

Emphasize that you are always available to talk. It may be that your child doesn't want to talk or can't find the words. Don't take it personally if the child shuts down. They probably just need some time alone. You can just let them know the door is open by saying something like "That's fine if you don't want to talk about it now, we can talk about it later if you want."



## Be a mental health role model

Share your feelings, share your day. Model the behavior you would like to see in your child. Children can feel stress and tension, and being vulnerable about difficulties and growth in yourself can show your child that everyone struggles, and that's OK. You can ask yourself: How do I manage anger? How do I manage stress, anxiety, conflict or difficult situations...?



## Be a good listener

Let your child talk about their feelings and thoughts. While often the problems children may present can seem trivial as an adult, validating their experiences and problems is important. Try not to trivialize or judge, and allow them to just share. Not every problem needs an active solution, often your child just knowing they are heard and cared for is enough to help them cope.



## Use open-ended questions

Open questions avoid getting answers like "Yes" or "No". Ask questions even if nothing is wrong, and let your child know that you care.



## Help your child to learn how to solve a problem

By learning to problem solve, children become more independent and responsible, they feel more confident which is a huge part of well-being. When the child is calm and relaxed, help him to identify the problem and find the solutions. You can ask questions like "What do you think you could do?" "What would a wise person do?", acknowledge their ideas, share yours and afterwards.



## Nurture your child's self-esteem

Children with a good sense of self-esteem are more well-adjusted and do better in school and in relationships. Acknowledging your child for their strengths, and efforts can boost their confidence and self-esteem.



## Encourage your child to talk about feelings

By talking about emotions, we help our child to identify, recognize and regulate the emotions. Sometimes children share something they are worried about, or upset, and the tendency of parents is to take responsibility and solve it for them. But sometimes, all you need to do is acknowledge the emotions and offer an understanding. Take time to share how you are doing everyday by sharing yours and ask your child to share theirs if they want.



## Self-care

You have likely heard the metaphor about needing to put on your own airplane oxygen mask before turning to the person next to you to help. This applies to mental well-being, you will be best able to support your child if you are well. Make time for yourself. Find activities that reduce stress and improve your life quality. Find time to talk about your emotions and experiences with someone you trust.



## Respect differences and allow for mistakes

Every child develops differently. It is better to see and value your child's success rather than compare them to a sibling or emphasize the negative things.



## Support your child to build positive mental health habits

Encourage your child to look after their physical health (sleep, food, exercise). Highlight the importance of looking after both physical and mental health and create healthy family habits together. Support them in their activities. Find together coping skills that work for you and your child when stress arises (e.g. deep breathing, taking a walk together).



*There is no shame in asking for help if you are not sure how exactly you can help your child or to encourage a better atmosphere at home. Every child, parent, and home is different and finding a healthy balance which leads to good mental health is a journey for everyone. You can try talking to a school psychologist or other parents, and there is also a parent helpline where you can call and share your worries and needs, and find support.*