



HEALTHY MINDS FAMILY DISCUSSION GUIDE

It's important to know what's happening in your child's life and how they are feeling. Asking prompting, open-ended questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer can help you have a better understanding of your child's mental health. Here are some questions that may help your child open up and talk to you about their feelings.

GENERAL HEALTHY MINDS QUESTIONS

Questions For Children of Any Age

1. What was the best part of your day today?
2. Is there anything that is bothering you or making you feel stressed out? What is it?
3. Is there anything that I am doing that is making you feel unhappy?
4. When you feel sad, worried or down, are you able to do things to help yourself feel better?
If yes, what do you do?
5. How is your body feeling?
6. What is your favorite thing about yourself?
7. What is your favorite thing to do? When was the last time you did it?
8. Who in the world do you think knows you best? Why did you choose them?
9. Do you ever feel like you do not matter?
10. Is there anything that you need my help with?

Questions For Elementary-Aged Children

1. What part of your day made you smile? What was the hardest part of your day?
2. Let's take a happiness temperature check. Cold means you feel sad or down, warm means you feel happy, hot mean you feel angry or mad about something. What is your happiness temperature right now?
3. How happy are you on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the happiest?
4. Who is your best friend? Why?
5. Do you ever feel like hurting yourself?

Questions For Teenagers

1. What is the most exciting thing happening in your life right now?
2. What is the most stressful or overwhelming thing happening in your life right now?
3. Who is in your group of friends? What kinds of things do you like doing together?
4. When you think about your future, what do you see?
5. Do you ever wish you were not alive anymore?



DIGGING DEEPER

Questions About Anxiety

1. I have noticed that you seem anxious lately. What are you anxious about?
2. Do your worries stop you from doing things? Like what? What do you fear will happen?
3. When you feel anxious or worried, do you feel it somewhere in your body? Where?
4. Are you having stomach aches or headaches? How is your appetite? Are you able to sleep?
5. Are you able to help yourself feel better or control your anxious thoughts? If yes, what do you do?
6. How long have you been feeling this way?
7. Do you think you need help with your anxiety?
8. How can I help you?

Questions About Depression

1. I have noticed that you seem down lately. Is there something bothering you? What is it?
2. Does the way you feel stop you from doing things? Like what?
3. Are you having stomach aches or headaches? How is your appetite? Are you able to sleep?
4. Are you able to do anything to help yourself feel better? If yes, what do you do?
5. How long have you been feeling this way?
6. Do you think you need help with how you are feeling?
7. How can I help you?

Questions About Loneliness and Isolation

1. I have noticed that you have been alone a lot lately. Why is that?
2. How does being alone so much make you feel?
3. Do you ever feel alone, unseen, unheard or disconnected no matter who is around you?
4. Are you talking to any of your friends? Do you want to?
5. Do you want to do anything outside of the house? What do you want to do?
6. Do you enjoy doing social things with other people? Like what?
7. Do you think you need help with how you are feeling?
8. How can I help you?



TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. Make these conversations a natural part of the day. They do not have to be a sit-down conversation. They can be spontaneous, casual interactions at first.
2. To avoid overwhelming your child or having them shut down emotionally, ask just two or three brief questions the first time you talk. If they are open to sharing, ask two or three more brief questions each time you talk. Ask more serious questions if needed once the conversations feel more open and natural.
3. To create a safe space and get the most out of these conversations, try to:
 - **Speak less.** Listen more.
 - **Lead with love.** Even if you do not understand.
 - **Turn off the “parent alarm.”** Listen without judgment and reaction. Try to keep your opinion and advice to yourself unless asked because this can put your child on the defensive and stop sharing.
 - **Not jump to worst-case scenario.** Kids need a calming, rational presence that will help to figure things out. When parents make it seem like a catastrophe will happen kids can end up feeling even more depressed.
 - **Not make it about you.** Resist the urge to try to relate to your child by sharing a story about yourself.
 - **Avoid lecturing.** Lectures are one-sided conversations where people are talked at, not to.
 - **Believe what they are saying about how they are feeling.** They are not making it up.
 - **Stay present.** Prevent all distractions so you can give the conversation your full attention.
 - **Do not change the subject.** Hearing that your child may be struggling emotionally will no doubt be very upsetting and uncomfortable. Do not let your discomfort derail the conversation.
 - **Avoid “bright siding.”** Listing all the things your child has in their life to feel good about to try to cheer them up can end up making them feel ashamed for their lack of gratitude.
 - **Be honest.** Talk honestly about your own feelings, concerns, challenges or any mental health issues you may be experiencing, versus hiding it. Share your family’s history with mental illness, if relevant.
4. If it is difficult for your child to open up to you, school counselors can help them become more comfortable talking about their emotions and feelings.
5. If it is difficult for your family to talk openly, family counselors are trained in how to guide these types of conversations. School counselors can also provide parents with tips for having these conversations.
6. Parents may feel overwhelmed that they are not doing everything correctly. Take one thing away from what you have learned and start to apply that. When you feel ready, try another.

*For some people, these conversations are going to feel very uncomfortable at first. The more you have them, the more natural they will become.

