

Healthy Minds: What Families Can Do

Our mental health is constantly impacted by what happens around us, in both good and bad ways. The more proactive we are about addressing our mental health, the more resilient we can be at navigating difficult situations throughout our lives. Help your family maintain a healthy mind and build resiliency by:

Being Aware

Knowing about current events in your child's life and any big changes they are going through socially, academically, emotionally or physically can help you be more engaged in supporting their mental health and addressing mental health challenges as they arise.

Talking to Your Child

To make mental health a priority and a normal part of your family's daily life, be sure to have regular family conversations about it. You can talk through your children's feelings or concerns, things happening at school or with friends, or how current events are impacting them. You can also try to share your own feelings, challenges and what is happening in your life. These conversations help you learn how your child is doing emotionally, build their ability to cope with life's stresses, and provide them with additional help if and when they need it. Talking about mental health with your kids shows them that their feelings matter, that they are not alone, and that they are loved and supported. It also helps you build trust, allow your child to know you better, and shows them that you are a relatable person who sometimes struggles too.

When you have these mental health discussions, make sure they're focused, distraction-free and routinely scheduled.

Prioritizing Healthy Lifestyles

Living a healthy lifestyle helps maintain good mental health and improves overall well-being. Small changes can make a big difference. It is never too late to commit to having a healthy mind and body! Maintain your family's mental health and well-being by:

- **Eating meals together.** Try to practice a healthy diet consisting of a lot of fruits, vegetables, beans and lean protein. Limit foods high in trans-fat and added sugars.
- **Exercising regularly.** A fun family challenge could be to see who can get the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity a week.
- **Limiting screen time.** Decide as a family how much time a day is OK for everyone, including parents, to be on their devices outside of work or school.
- **Getting the recommended amount of sleep each night.** Kids ages six to 12 need nine to 12 hours of sleep, teenagers need eight to 10 hours, and adults need seven to nine hours a night. As a family, agree to establish a consistent bedtime. Remove all devices from the bedrooms.
- **Managing your stress.** Start by identifying what in your life is causing you stress and trying to figure out health ways to manage it.
- **Finding which relaxation techniques work for your family and practice them together.** There are many free online videos and apps to teach your family popular techniques like deep breathing, meditation or yoga. Listening to music, drawing, journaling or going for a walk outside can also be helpful.

Modeling Good Mental Health Behavior

Children learn from watching their parents. If they see you prioritizing your mental and physical health, maintaining healthy, meaningful relationships, and practicing healthy coping strategies every day, they are more likely to do it too.

Speaking Up for Your Child

You can make sure that your child is safe and supported at home. But it's also important that your child's environment outside of your home supports their good mental health. You can speak up for your child by going to your PTA, your school leadership and your school- or community-based organizations to make sure...

- **Your child's school is welcoming, safe and connected.** You can ask your child's teacher or Principal what the school is doing to foster social-emotional learning (SEL) for all children or, if needed, advocate for in-school mental health resources.
- **Your child's healthcare team routinely screens for mental health and wellness,** listens to your child and to you, and communicates openly and effectively. This could include out-of-school or in-school doctors or medical professionals.
- **Clubs, sports teams and activities outside of school are inclusive of everyone.** Gather other engaged parents and speak up to create a welcoming environment.