

Mental Health & Wellness Resources

How to Talk to Your Child or Teen About Mental Health

Create a Safe Space to Talk

Ideally, a safe space is something you create over time. Find ways to connect with your child about things going on in their lives. Plan activities they enjoy, things that make them feel comfortable. In this relaxed atmosphere, have a low-stakes conversation by asking your child about their friends, school, interest, current events, and how they feel about those things.

Open the Door for Sharing

Talking about mental health is easier than you think. Start with the questions below, designed to encourage children and teens to talk about themselves. These conversations should help build trust and open the door for your child to share more about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Look for Other Adult Helpers

If your child doesn't want to open up to you, is there another adult they'd be more comfortable with – a mentor, coach, relative, or religious leader? Sometimes kids find it easier to talk to someone other than a parent or caregiver, and that's O.K.! What's important is that your child has opportunities to share their feelings and experiences with a supportive adult.

| What to Say... | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Instead of...</i> | <i>Try...</i> |
| "You'll be fine. Just get over it." | "Wow, that sounds really difficult. I'm sorry you're going through that. I'm here for you." |
| "Just try to be more positive." | "I'm sorry you're feeling down right now. I'm here to listen." |
| "Why are you crabby all the time?" | "I noticed you don't seem like yourself lately. Is everything okay? I'm here for you." |



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| “You need to go to bed earlier.” | “I noticed you’re staying up pretty late. Are you having trouble sleeping? What’s keeping you up?” |
| “Why aren’t you doing your homework? You need to get your grades up.” | “It seems like you’re having trouble in school, what’s going on? How can I help?” |
| “Why do you always pick at your food?” | “I noticed you haven’t eaten much, how are you feeling?” |
| “You need to calm down.” | “I see that you’re upset. Can you tell me more about what’s going on?” |
| “Just look on the bright side.” | “Sometimes it must seem like things are stacked against you. We’ll get through this together.” |
| “You just need to take some deep breaths.” | “What can I do to help you get through that situation if it comes up again?” |
| “You know, I feel that same way, and here’s what I do about it.” | “I think I understand that you feel _____ when _____ happens, is that right?” |

What to Watch For

Many children and teens have ups and downs in their mood and behavior. You know your child best and if you are worried, get help. If you’re unsure, try providing extra support, attention, and explicit check-ins for 2-3 weeks. If after some time you continue to have concerns, please seek help from your pediatrician or another resource (see “Where to Get More Help” below).



| <p>Warning Behaviors: Monitor & Reach Out For Help</p> | <p>Emergency Behaviors – Do Not Ignore: Call a Mental Health Professional or 988</p> |
|---|--|
| Inability to cope with problems or daily activities | Obsession with death or dying |
| Changes in ability to manage responsibilities | Direct or indirect thoughts of suicide (verbal, written – notes, “threats”) |
| Changes in eating or sleeping habits | Significant changes in appearance or hygiene |
| Changes in school attendance or performance | Giving away possessions for no logical reason |
| Frequent bodily complaints like headaches or stomachaches | A dramatic change in personality or functioning over a long period of time |
| Helplessness, hopelessness | Severe agitation |
| Feeling or appearing restless; difficulty concentrating | Risky or self-destructive activities |
| Withdrawing from/avoiding social interactions | Lack of interest in future plans |
| Persistent disobedience or aggression | Total withdrawal from people and environment |
| Persistent sadness | Increased drug or alcohol use |
| Dieting and exercising excessively | Any of the “warning” behaviors happening over a long period of time or to an extreme |
| Physical aggression towards others; threats of serious violence; property destruction | <p>Self-harm can be, but often isn’t, a sign of immediate danger. Always reach out for help if your child is self-harming.</p> |
| Outbursts or extreme irritability | |
| Severe worry or anxiety | |
| Severe mood swings* | |
| Drug or alcohol use+ | |

*More than normal for him/her or their age (for example a teen will have more mood swings than a 10-year-old).

+ Experimentation in teens is OK, if they’re not putting themselves into dangerous situations; regular, consistent, or extreme use is not OK.



Don't Forget Yourself

Signs you need to take some time for self-care:

- ✓ Change in sleeping or eating habits
- ✓ Headaches, dizziness, or stomach upset
- ✓ Feeling unsafe, unhappy, guilty, vulnerable, anxious, or lonely
- ✓ Difficulty concentrating
- ✓ Withdrawn or irritated; crying or anger outbursts; no longer enjoy the things you used to

Take time to nourish your physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual needs.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

- **Parenting Tips by Age:**
 - Click [here](#) or scan the QR code for more information.



- **Information about Signs of Mental Health Issues:**
 - Click [here](#) or scan the QR code for more information.



- **Children and Mental Health: Is This Just a Stage?**
 - Click [here](#) or scan the QR code for more information.



- ***Teaching Kids to be Smart about Social Media:***

- Click [here](#) or scan the QR code for more information.



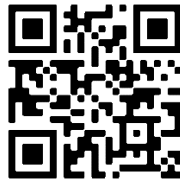
- ***Parents' Guides to Social Media Apps and other Helpful Resources:***

- Click [here](#) or scan the QR code for more information.



- ***Cyberbullying:***

- Click [here](#) or scan the QR code for more information.



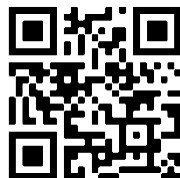
- ***Talking to your Kids about Sexting:***

- Click [here](#) or scan the QR code for more information.



- ***Health Advisory on Social Media use in Adolescence:***

- Click [here](#) or scan the QR code for more information.





Where to Get More Help

988 – National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

- Dial or text 988
- 988lifeline.org to chat

Crisis Text Line - 24/7 Free Crisis Line Services

- Text HOME to 741741
- <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

The Trevor Project - 24/7 Free Crisis Line Services for LGBTQ Young People

- Call 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678
- Or chat with their [Helpline](#)
- <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

Call BlackLine - Limited Temporary Call Hours (Please see website)

- Call 1-800-604-5841
- <http://www.callblackline.com>
- BlackLine prioritizes BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)

Linea Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio - 24/7, servicios gratuitos en español

- Llama al número 1-888-628-9454
- <https://988lifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol/>

OneLove Foundation – information about healthy relationships for adolescents.

- <https://www.joinonelove.org/>