

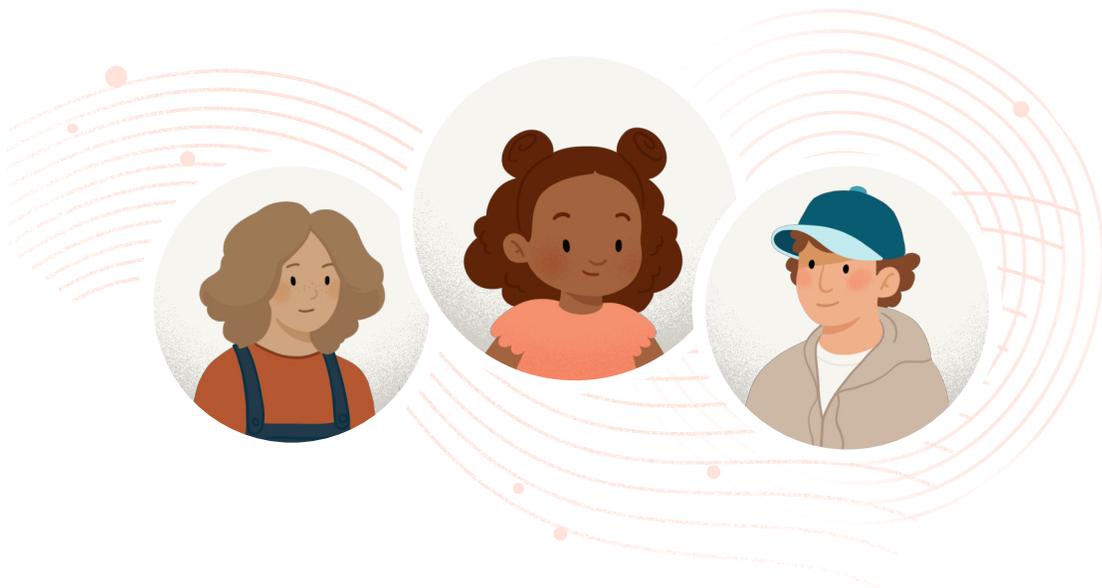
How to Support the Mental Health of Kids and Teens

Learn about trends in children's mental health and ways to promote their well-being

Raising children can feel meaningful, enjoyable, and rewarding. Still, caring for kids and teens often involves tremendous worry. We tend to fret over their health, school performance, social behavior, and more.

Many parents and caregivers are also worrying about their kids' emotional well-being. We want our kids to enjoy life, feel good about themselves, and recover from setbacks. When our children aren't thriving, it can be profoundly stressful for the whole household.

Fortunately, parents and caregivers can play a pivotal role in supporting their kids' mental health through coaching and evidence-based support.



Children's mental health concerns are on the rise

In addition to the typical stressors that come with growing up, like starting school or navigating puberty, kids today also encounter stress due to social media, political unrest, natural disasters, and school shootings. Such stressors are likely contributing to alarming trends in children's mental health.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#):



1 in 6 kids has a mental health condition at any given time



42 percent of teens felt persistently sad and hopeless



1 in 5 teens reported seriously considering suicide

Thankfully, many of these mental health conditions are treatable. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to take action to address kids' distress and connect them to professional support.

How to help kids navigate transitions



Talk about what's changing. Ask your kids to share pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Let them know that what they're feeling makes sense given the circumstances, and encourage them to be patient with themselves. For example, "What's something you're excited about? What's something you're nervous about? It makes sense to feel excited and nervous sometimes...."



Check in regularly. Initiate regular conversations about personal thoughts and feelings. Such conversations can support a trusting relationship and help your child feel more comfortable sharing distress. Consider a daily game, like "high, low, buffalo"—everyone shares a highlight of the day, a low of the day, and something random (the buffalo).



Exude optimism. Look for the positive and express enthusiasm about what's changing, and remain confident that your child will adjust. Maintaining a positive attitude can help your child feel more confident. For example, “Your new math teacher seems awesome. I think you’ll like algebra too!”



Manage your own reactions. Remind yourself that your child will likely adapt, especially with your support. Managing your stress through self-care can also show kids how to manage their stress.



Watch for signs of distress. Upsetting changes in behavior or ups and downs in mood are typical—especially for teens who are navigating changes. It can be hard to know when our kids’ upsetting behaviors warrant concern. Learning the signs of distress can help us know when to act.

What are the signs of distress in kids and teens?

If your child is showing signs of distress for more than a few weeks, and their behavior is very disruptive or upsetting, consider seeking care. Reach out for support immediately if you’re concerned about your child hurting themselves or others.



Emotional distress signs

- Frequent tearfulness, appearing sad
- Lacking interest or motivation
- Frequent angry outbursts
- Being very upset about being away from you



Behavioral distress signs

- Trouble paying attention or sitting still
- Being aggressive, defiant, or destructive
- Difficulty getting along or socializing with others
- Doing things they’ve outgrown (bed-wetting, etc.)



Physical distress signs

- Aches and pains without a medical cause
- Weight gain or loss not consistent with growth
- Trouble getting out of bed
- Excessive foot tapping or leg shaking



6 ways to talk to kids about their mental health

Talking to kids about their feelings is important, especially when we're concerned. Conversations about emotions can help us understand what our kids are going through and how to help. Consider the suggestions below for discussing mental health with your child. You can adjust the language for your child's age and personality.



Stay calm. Maintaining your composure so as not to judge or react strongly can help your child be more open and honest. Taking deep breaths before and during the conversation can help you stay level-headed.



Express concern. Using a kind tone, describe the changes you've noticed and invite them to share their thoughts or feelings. For example, "You've seemed stressed before school lately. Have you been feeling worried?"



Listen and show understanding. Give your child time to speak without jumping in to offer advice or problem solve. Instead, remind them they aren't alone. For example, "It's OK to feel scared. I've felt scared too, and I think other kids are feeling similarly." If your child doesn't share right away, it may take a few attempts before your child opens up. Try again in a few days.



Express love and offer comfort. Through words and physical affection, tell your child you love them. Kids may worry that having struggles will disappoint their parents. Ensuring your child knows you love them no matter what can offer reassurance.



Discuss professional support. If you're considering therapy for your child, tell them what care is and how it can help. Comparing mental health care to medical care may be useful. For example, you could say, "Mental health therapists are like doctors for upsetting feelings and thoughts. Therapists help us understand what's going on and teach us things we can do to feel better."



Ask for their input and continue checking in. Inviting your child to share their ideas can empower them and help you better support them. Let them know that they can talk to you about their mental health anytime and that you'll keep checking in. For example, "What do you think might help? It's OK if you're not sure. You can talk to me about your feelings anytime. I'll also check in with you in a few days."



Get support for your family

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