

Mental Wellness Toolkit



Valley
Children's
HEALTHCARE

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The Mental Health Toolkit aims to help parents and families to better understand the importance of mental health. Each resource provides insight into various facets of mental health and wellness, such as practicing mindfulness and learning the appropriate words to use when discussing mental health.

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By Dr. Carmela Sosa, Valley Children’s Medical Director of Primary Care

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Health from Every Degree



Our mental health is just as important to maintain as our physical health. It is imperative to value every "degree" of our health, such as stress and anxiety. In fact, our social, emotional and psychological well-being impacts our physical health.

One method for maintaining mental health is practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present in the moment. It asks you to pause, breathe, take in the world around you and acknowledge the various thoughts, feelings and sensations floating across your mind at the time.

It's important to know that mindfulness is learned over time through practice. By learning mindfulness techniques at an early age, children can practice as they grow and build a foundation of stress management and self-soothing for their long-term mental health and resilience.

By Dr. Carmela Sosa

Valley Children's Medical Director of Primary Care

Mindfulness Activities

Try these two activities with your kids to practice and build mindfulness skills.

1. What's in the bag?

This anxiety-reducing activity is especially good for younger children because it focuses their energy and attention on things they can actually physically touch, instead of asking them to describe intangible things, like thoughts or feelings.

- Place a few common household items in a non-see-through bag.
- Using only their sense of touch, have your child reach in and describe what they feel.

2. Notice five things

This activity, often called “grounding,” is a great way to reduce anxiety for kids, teens and adults. Taking a few moments to notice the world around you can help bring you back to the present.

- Sit down with your child wherever you are.
- Together, take a few deep breaths, then slowly look around and notice five things around you.
- Take turns sharing what you saw.
- You can also practice noticing five things you hear or feel.



Signs Your Child May Be Struggling with Mental Health

Talking to your kids about anxiety and depression is important to help them work through their feelings and prevent emotions from snowballing. Discussions are best when done in a place where they feel safe and comfortable.

Consider these tips as you prepare to talk to your kids about mental health:

- Make this a conversation rather than a lecture. This will make your child more likely to share their thoughts and feelings with you.
- Be mindful of the tone you use when discussing mental health. Being matter-of-fact and neutral when discussing mental health can help reduce the stigma or feelings of fear related to sharing.
- Even if you feel differently about your child's struggles than they do, make sure to validate and normalize how they are feeling. When children feel dismissed or that their problems are "not a big deal," they are often less likely to confide in others.
- Try to resist the urge to "fix the problem" for your child. Giving advice too quickly often shuts down the conversation, especially when children just want to be heard.

Remember that discussing mental health is not a one-time conversation. Be sure that you are checking in with your child regularly, even when nothing is wrong. Try to ask open-ended questions to open up a conversation and make sharing more natural. Give children the opportunity to ask questions, and pay attention to the reactions they have to what you share or ask.



For example, rather than asking, “Did you have a good day at school today?” which leaves two options - yes or no - try something like, “Tell me what school was like for you today.” Asking them what an experience was like for them doesn’t limit the conversation and allows kids to share more about their day.

Be sure to model positive sharing about emotions and challenges that you face because children learn from those around them. If you are comfortable and open about sharing how you feel, they are more likely to become more comfortable with sharing themselves.

If you suspect your child is anxious or depressed, seeking help early is important! Talk with your child’s pediatrician or primary care doctor and they can refer you to a mental health provider in your community. Schools are also a good resource for counseling support and referrals, so look into the resources available to you.

Pressures that kids face today are enormous. Things that contribute to stress in kids may include anxiety with returning to school, academic concerns, social pressures, social media and the general uncertainty. Parents should be on the lookout for any significant changes in their child’s mood or behavior.



Signs of Anxiety or Depression in Kids May Include:

- Persistent sadness, anger or fear
- Changes in eating habits or sleep
- Withdrawal from or avoiding interactions with others
- Outbursts or extreme irritability
- Drastic changes in mood or behavior
- No longer enjoying activities they previously enjoyed
- Avoiding or missing school
- Talking about hurting themselves or suicide

By Dr. Merideth Wirstiuk

Valley Children's Pediatric Psychologist

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, or would like emotional support, the following resources are available 24/7.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

(800) 273-8255

Crisis Text Line:

Text HOME to 741741

If in a life-threatening emergency, dial 911.

Words Matter

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Over the last two years, we have seen a significant increase in mental health conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to have conversations about mental health more than ever. Having regular conversations about mental health reduces stigma and promotes an environment of understanding. The words you use matter and it is important to be mindful of how we approach conversations about mental health.

Use language that is honest but appropriate for your child's age and development. Being matter-of-fact and neutral when discussing mental health can help reduce stigma or feelings of fear related to sharing. Using language that promotes understanding of mental health can help a child or teenager feel more comfortable, more willing to talk, and more willing to reach out for support early.

A helpful strategy when talking about mental health is using person-first language. A person is not their mental health condition in the same way a person is not their medical condition. For example, you would not say someone "is cancer" so we would not want to say someone "is bipolar." Consider using phrases such as "my daughter has bipolar disorder" or a "person with a mental health condition." Using phrases that empower and provide hope can help children and teenagers feel supported.

Example:

Mental illness
He is bipolar.
Suffers from or afflicted with
Mentally ill
Trauma victim

Preferred Language:

Mental health condition
He has bipolar disorder.
Lives with
Experiences a mental health condition
Trauma survivor

Words are especially important when discussing suicide. For example, saying “committed suicide” implies that suicide is a crime. By using words that are clear and neutral, you can help people feel supported and empowered to ask for help.

Example:

Committed suicide
Failed suicide/unsuccessful attempt
Successful or completed suicide
Chose to kill themselves
Threatened

Preferred Language:

Died by suicide
Attempted suicide/suicide attempt
Died as the result of self-inflicted injury
Took their own life
Disclosed

You don't need to know all the answers or be an expert to talk to your child about mental health. Start having conversations about mental health and know that there are resources available to help your child if they need.

By Dr. Michael Danovsky

Valley Children's Manager of Pediatric Psychology Services

By Dr. Amanda Suplee

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Mental Health Minutes

Mental Health Minutes are small activities that one can practice throughout their day to promote positive mental health habits. While each activity only takes a minute, the impacts last well beyond.

Take a minute to reach out to a friend or loved one. Whether it's a brief text or phone call, connecting with others is a valuable way to give our minds a healthy boost.



Take a minute to close your eyes and rest. Enjoy a moment of quiet or reflect on something that brings you joy.

Take a minute to move and groove. Moments of physical activity, such as a short walk, improve mental wellness.



Take a minute to reflect on three things you are grateful for. Gratitude helps reinforce positive emotions and encourages a healthy mindset.

Take a minute to take a deep breath. Breathe in and count to three, then breathe out. This simple activity is effective for reducing stress and encouraging relaxation.

