



Social, Emotional, and Mental Health

How to Support Your Child through the School Years

HELPING CHILDREN EXPRESS FEELINGS

- Encourage children to talk about their feelings
- Provide opportunities for children to share both their positive and negative feelings
- Be a good listener
- Acknowledge feelings without apologizing or giving in
- Try not to judge feelings. All feelings are acceptable, but all behaviors are not
- Help children distinguish between what they feel and what they do
- Encourage positive ways to express feelings: go for a walk, talk to a friend

HELPING CHILDREN HANDLE STRESS

- Make sure your child eats healthy and is well-rested.
- Encourage hobbies or interests
- Help your child identify ways to relax or positive ways to “blow off steam”
- Encourage your child to do their best when possible, but acknowledge that failure and disappointment are a part of life. Help them see opportunities to keep trying.
- Share your beliefs and values about what is important and central to your life
- Be aware of your own stress. How you cope with stress directly affects your child(ren).
- Help your child set realistic goals and a plan for achieving those goals.
- Remember that not all stress is bad. Taking positive risks is a healthy and positive part of learning and growing up.

~ The Medical Foundation and Mt. Auburn Hospital Prevention & Training Center

TIPS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSES TO YOUTH

- Model the behavior you want to see. Children learn from the examples we set.
- Set a few simple, but important rules with set consequences. Be clear. Make sure rules and consequences are understood.
- Being consistent & fair with consequences will reinforce a child’s understanding of right from wrong.
- Promote positive behavior. Show appreciation for positive actions.
- Give choices. This fosters a sense of freedom, confidence and independence.
- Choose your battles. If there is no risk of injury or harm (to themselves or others), it may be best to let your child follow through with their decision.
- Allow the expression of feelings in a safe manner.

~ Health Resources in Action

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TIPS FROM TONIGHTS PANELISTS

SMALL THINGS YOU CAN DO AT HOME THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE ...

When talking to your child, you may get more specific answers if you ask more specific questions, rather than open ended ones. For example, instead of asking "What did you do at school?" say "Tell me one of your favorite parts of the day or one of your least favorite parts of the day."

Model healthy habits and ways of thinking at home.

Always find time to "check in" with your son and daughter every day. For example, a good time to talk is in the car ride to practice or other after school activities. Keep the lines of communication open between you and your children. You want them to trust you.

REACH OUT TO YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL ...

Set up a conference with your child's classroom teacher and counselor. The purpose of the meeting would be to share thoughts or concerns regarding signs of anxiety or depression. Also, communicate these thoughts with the child's pediatrician.

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED ...

Look for signs of any changes in appetite, sleep, mood, interests, friendships, etc. Early communication and intervention is best.

Learn how to recognize academic stress. Students can benefit from academic challenges at school. For example, taking a higher-level course is a positive risk that can foster confidence and self-esteem. However, when it becomes detrimental to the mental, emotional, and social well-being of the student, the caseload needs to be re-evaluated. Students often place an extreme amount of pressure on themselves due to one upcoming test/assignment, basing self-worth on grades alone – example: "I have to get an A on this test tomorrow or I'm not good enough". Talk with your child regularly about schoolwork. Recognize the common signs of stress. Work together to develop a stress-reduction plan.

Know the signs of substance use. Individuals whose social, emotional and mental health needs are not being met are at a greater risk for substance use. Common signs of substance use may include a sudden decrease in academic performance, loss of interest in activities/hobbies, new social groups, changes in behavior, or an increase in wanting to be alone/withdrawal from family. Talk with your child if you suspect he or she may be using alcohol or other drugs. If you have concerns about your child, talk with his or her pediatrician. They can offer resources for support and intervention.