



# Parenting for Prevention

*Social-Emotional & Mental Health  
How to Support Your Child through the School Years*

## Why it's Important

Human beings are complex creatures. Our physical bodies do amazing things and we try to make the right choices to support our physical health ... eating a healthy diet, getting the recommended hours of sleep, and staying physically active. It's not hard to tell when our physical health is out of balance and we need to take action to get back on track. Our social-emotional and mental health are equally important. These are the variables of health that we cannot see, but are a vital component to our overall health and well-being. As parents, it is important to nurture social-emotional and mental health development in our children as they grow and to recognize when our loved ones need extra support.

## What is Healthy Social-Emotional Development?

Healthy social-emotional development includes the ability to:

- Form and sustain positive relationships
- Experience, manage, and express emotions, thoughts and behaviors
- Explore and engage with the environment

Children with well-developed social-emotional skills have:

- **Self-awareness:** self-confidence, ability to identify emotions and feelings, self-efficacy
- **Self-management:** impulse control, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal setting
- **Social awareness:** perspective taking, empathy, respect for others, appreciating diversity
- **Relationship skills:** communication skills, ability to work in a team, social engagement
- **Responsible decision-making:** identifying problems, analyzing situations, creating solutions, evaluation



## What is Mental Health?



Mental Health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

Positive mental health helps support:

- Being more effective in coping with the stresses of life
- Working productively and fruitfully
- Making a positive contribution to one's community

## 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, 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 part of learning and growing up.

## 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 known consequences for breaking the rules. Be consistent in enforcing the rules.
- Being consistent and 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 allow your child to make a mistake.
- Allow the expression of feelings in a safe manner.

### RESOURCES

**CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning**

<http://www.casel.org>

**Center for the Social & Emotional Foundations for Early Learning**

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/index.html>

**Missouri Department of Mental Health**

<http://dmh.mo.gov/healthykids/about.html>

**Parent Toolkit: Produced NBC News Education Nation**

<http://www.parenttoolkit.com>

**PBS Parents**

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopmenttracker/six/socialandemotionalgrowth.html>

*Parenting for Prevention is a Decisions at Every Turn Coalition educational series for parents and other caring adults to increase awareness and knowledge about important youth issues and to encourage dialogue about making healthy choices.*

*Please visit <http://www.AshlandDecisions.org/parent-tip-sheets.html> for our complete library of tip sheets.*

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