

Children's Mental Health

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Mental health affects almost every part of our lives. It affects how we think, how we feel, how we act, how we handle stress, how we relate to others, and how we make decisions. Mental health can also affect how we feel physically.

Like physical health, mental health is important for people of all ages, including children. Some common mental health problems children may face include depression, anxiety, behavior disorders, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. These problems can make it challenging for children to get along with others, to succeed in school, and to enjoy life.

There are things we can all do to help promote children's and our own mental health. A good place to start is taking good care of ourselves. This means eating healthy food, getting plenty of sleep, and exercising regularly. Spending time with friends and family and participating in fun activities are also great ways to boost mental health. Try to leave time in your child's schedule for free play.

In today's busy world, it is hard to avoid stress, even for children. However, taking steps to reduce stress can help promote good mental health. Teaching children healthy ways to handle stress can also help. Talk with your child about things that may be bothering him or her. Help your child to express what he or she is feeling and let him or her know it is okay to have those feelings. Try practicing some simple relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or aromatherapy. Children who know how to handle stress and who feel they are loved are better able to face life's challenges.

Sometimes children need more help than we can provide. Some signs that your child may need extra help include failing in school performance, loss of interest in activities your child used to enjoy, complaining often about physical symptoms such as stomach aches or headaches, fidgeting or moving around a lot, persistent nightmares, persistent aggression or defiance, or frequent unexplained temper tantrums. Some of these can be normal if they are less intense or less frequent. If they are making it hard for your child to participate in normal activities or are causing you concern, that is a sign it is time to ask for help. Always seek help if your child threatens to harm him or herself or others.

If you have concerns about your child's mental health, contact his or her health care provider. Depending on what the provider finds, he or she might recommend your child see a specialist, such as a psychiatrist or therapist. The specialist can provide treatment and resources to address your child's needs.

Although it can be hard to ask for help, taking action to protect your child's mental health can have a big impact on their lives. Mental health concerns are common and there are treatments and resources available to help you. By promoting your child's mental health and seeking help when needed, you can provide your child with a foundation to succeed in life.

Resources and references:

Healthy Children at: <http://www.healthychildren.org>

The National Institutes of Health at: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childmentalhealth.html>

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at: <http://www.aacap.org/>

(This article is not meant to be a substitute for medical advice or care. Please seek medical care from your own health care provider.)