



OUR GUIDE TO
PARENTAL SUPPORT

How to care for your child's mental health

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Introduction

Why is parental support important?

Parental support can encourage a range of positive outcomes. Studies have found that increased parental support is linked with improved sleep quality and quantity, in both children and parents. With supported parents, children can continue to grow and succeed in everything they do. Warm and supportive relationships are the best way to facilitate parent-child communication which in turn, enables parental knowledge. This is important, as having open conversations about mental health with your child will help you understand their thoughts and emotions

in certain situations. In turn, this can promote a way to support any challenges and worries they are experiencing. It has shown to positively affect perceived self-efficacy as well as future career choices and adaptability. This is especially true in times of change and uncertainty. If you help your child to understand that sometimes change is inevitable but that they do have the ability to adapt and overcome these challenges, they are most likely to cope better and become more resilient over time.

Monitoring your child's mental health

Spotting the signs

Mental health presents differently from person to person so it's important to keep that in mind. Remember that you are not there to diagnose, rather you are trying to understand whether your child needs more support. There are generally three main changes that you might be able to observe if your child is presenting some mental health problems.

Examples include:



PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Excessive and uncontrollable worry
- Distress
- Tearfulness
- Low mood



BEHAVIOURAL

- Lack of sleep
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty relaxing



PHYSICAL

- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Appetite and weight changes

When should I worry?

There are no definite signs when one should worry as mental health is on a spectrum. Many different things can lead us to move up and down the spectrum, such as changes in our personal life like breakups, difficulties in relationships, new jobs or general changes in our physical health. For example, when you hear bad news you might be upset and feel a bit low for some time, but this should improve with time.

Although, it's important to know that low mood does not necessarily mean that the person has a mental health problem. As parents and carers there are ways to support your child to give them the best chance to stay mentally healthy.

Early detection and prevention can help with recovery, hence it is best to

discreetly monitor how your child is feeling and behaving on a daily basis. Look at how often a behaviour occurs, the intensity and how long it lasts can help you decide if it is a problem.

If you see that changes to your child's behaviour and mood are drastic or are persisting for a long time, it is important to have a conversation. Especially, if you see that they are feeling distressed or it's affecting their daily functioning.

This could include things like, staying in bed most days, not getting enough sleep, not looking after their personal hygiene or not showing interest in the activities they would often do. Depending on their level of distress and risk you may need to contact support services as soon as possible.

Risk Assessment



RISK TO SELF

Do you think your child might be in danger or pose a risk to themselves?

For example, where they seriously want to harm themselves such as self-harming, reckless behaviour or suicidal thoughts.



RISK TO OTHERS

Could it be that others may be at risk?

Are they impulsive or aggressive towards others?

What makes you believe this?

Were there any/many incidents or near misses lately?

Gaming

Gaming, or playing electronic games via consoles such as x-boxes, smartphone apps, computers or other devices, has become a popular activity for many, especially during the last couple of years. As a parent you may feel worried about the feelings and behaviours your child experiences around gaming, as well as the amount of time they spend gaming. Here are some tips to set boundaries around screen time:

1. FAMILY AGREEMENT

Allow everyone in the family to negotiate screen limits together, helping children to feel empowered by giving them a space to say what they need eg asking adults to limit their own usage of social media/screening time.

2. FOLLOW THROUGH ON THE CONSEQUENCES YOU HAVE AGREED WITH YOUR CHILD

This will help to make the boundaries clear and consistent.

3. THINK TOGETHER ABOUT HOW TO STOP A GAMING SESSION

It might help to use a sand timer or stopwatch to remind them how long they've got left, use in-game timers to set a fixed play time or agree the stopping point in a way that works for the game they're playing – for example, stopping at the end of a particular level.

4. OFFLINE ACTIVITIES

Some children and young people game a lot because it feels like a space in which they are accepted, and they haven't been able to find this offline. Talk with them about other fun and creative activities they might enjoy doing alone, with peers or with the family, which they can try alongside gaming.

5. GAME TOGETHER

Finding games you both enjoy can turn gaming into something that helps you spend quality time together. However, remember to respect your child's wishes if they don't want to play with you, as some games may feel very personal to them.

6. AVOID ARGUMENTS WHEN EMOTIONS ARE RUNNING HIGH

Try not to react or argue back when your child is feeling worked-up, as this will escalate the situation. Give yourself and your child a chance to have some space before you talk.

7. MAKE IT CLEAR THAT YOU'RE COMING FROM A PLACE OF LOVE AND CONCERN

When you're stuck in cycles of arguments, it's easy for both you and your child to focus on the negatives. Remember to let them know that you're helping them to set limits because you care about them.

8. TALK TO OTHER PARENTS

Are they finding this issue difficult and what do they think might help? Are there boundaries you can set together so that your child experiences the same limits as their friends?

It's a good idea to set these limits in a way that encourages your child to avoid screens for at least an hour before bedtime, in order to help them sleep well.

Having mindful conversations

There are ways to have these mindful talks and the tips outlined below should make these conversations easier.

1. FIND A GOOD TIME & PLACE

Pick an opportunity when you know you are not going to get interrupted and make sure that both of you feel comfortable. For instance, if your child just finished school for the day, they might be too tired and disengaged in having any conversations. So timing, placement and the situation are crucial factors when planning to have a mindful conversation.

2. HOW ARE YOU GOING TO INTRODUCE A SUBJECT?

Starting a conversation can be challenging so have a think about the best way to approach your child. You could mention a recent news story or simply just explain why you would like to talk to them. Be clear and don't confuse them!

3. DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

It's important not to make assumptions, your child will not want you to decide for them how they are feeling and why they might be feeling in this particular way. Make sure you are asking open-ended questions. Asking questions such as 'How are you feeling? How was your day?' can prompt them to talk and provide more depth and lengthier responses.

4. LISTEN & DON'T JUDGE

Give your child time and space to talk about whatever they feel comfortable with. If you try to include your own interpretations and opinions they might get defensive. It can also be tempting to fill the spaces during the conversation, so try not to interrupt them and listen.

5. SUMMARISE WHAT THEY HAVE TOLD YOU

Repeat what you have heard from them using different phrases and words. This can further prompt them to elaborate and engage more in the conversation.

6. DON'T SAY THAT YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT THEM, JUST ASK HOW THEY ARE FEELING

Letting your child know that you are worried can upset them, as they don't want to be the reason for your stress or worry. If your child sees that you are in fact worried, tell them what is troubling you. Help them understand the reasons for your concerns.

7. TRY NOT TO GET UPSET AND REMAIN CALM

If you become agitated or nervous your child might be put off talking to you.


8. REASSURE THEM

Let them know that how they are feeling is valid and important; that it's okay for them to feel, however they may be feeling.

9. BE SUPPORTIVE

Some conversations can be difficult so regardless of the outcome, always let your child know that you care and love them.

Don't always try to solve the issue, sometimes they just need a hug or a shoulder to cry on.



Ask your child what they think might help them, they might have some ideas in mind and may want someone to listen and reassure them that they are going in the right direction.

To normalise the conversation you also need to be vulnerable and openly talk about your feelings.

What if they don't want to talk?

Don't give up. Try to approach them another time or find a different way to start the conversation. Be patient and make sure that they know that they can come to you at any point to talk to you.

Managing your emotions

Managing your worries

It's important that, as a parent, you are able to manage your stress and worries so that you can feel able to best support your child as well. Remember that children are generally resilient, sometimes more so than adults. There are ways that parents can manage their worries:

1

WRITE DOWN YOUR WORRIES

If an anxious thought or worry comes into your head, make a brief note of it and then continue with your day.

2

SCHEDULE 'WORRY TIME'

Where you can work through your worry list. Limit this to no more than 30 minutes a day. Challenge anxious worries and thoughts by asking yourself:

- What's the evidence that the thought is true/not true?
- Is this worry truly important or not?
- Is there a more positive, realistic way of looking at the situation?
- Is the thought helpful?
- What is the worst that can happen?
- What is the likelihood of something bad happening?

3

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MANAGEABLE AND UNMANAGEABLE WORRIES

Solvable worries are the ones you can take action on right away. For example, what your child eats, whereas, the unsolvable worries are those where there is no corresponding action eg what if my child has an accident?

4

IF THE WORRY IS UNSOLVABLE ACCEPT THE UNCERTAINTY

Put your effort into what you have control over and let go of what you don't. Letting go will help you feel calmer.

5

TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT YOUR WORRIES

Social support plays an important role in fostering good mental health and can help to alleviate worries by offering different perspectives and an opportunity to troubleshoot.

6

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing attention on the moment to moment experience. The way we think, and the content of our thoughts, affects how we feel and act. Being aware of when our thoughts get captured by regrets of the past or the worries of the future, as well as being able to disengage from automatic way of thinkings can be very helpful when managing stress.

Ways to manage and control your emotions



CBT

Practising cognitive behavioural skills may help you to identify thoughts or feelings that may not be helpful in a particular situation. You may learn to challenge and reposition these thoughts so that they influence your mood and behaviour in an adaptive way. CBT is an effective treatment for a variety of mental health conditions, but learning these skills may also prevent them from occurring and can help you to deal with stressful situations more effectively.



DEEP OR PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

This technique can help you break the cycle of worry as you are focusing your mind on your body instead of your thoughts. This is effective at reducing anxiety and improving sleep.



SELF-SUGGESTION

Helps to create a feeling of calmness in stressful situations using the power of association and visualisation.

Self-care tips

1. DON'T BLAME YOURSELF

Parenting can be hard and it's easy to be hard on yourself when your child is having problems. Their powerful emotions might affect you and cause you to feel more stressed and worried. Remember that you are not a bad parent for feeling this way.

2. SHARE THE LOAD

Share daily chores to make sure that you are not stuck doing everything on your own as this can be extremely overwhelming. Create a chore checklist and decide who is going to be responsible for each household chore.

3. REMEMBER TO TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

Parents often forget to take care of themselves and often place their needs at the bottom of the list of priorities. Trying to juggle parenting, teaching and work can be stressful and demanding. Finding some 'me' time every day to do things you enjoy. Read a book, watch a film, have a long bath, whatever it is that will help you relax and take your mind off things.

4. BE ACTIVE

Exercise is one of the most effective ways of dealing with stress. It will also help you to get a better night's sleep.

5. EAT A HEALTHY & BALANCED DIET

What you eat has an effect on your mood. Healthy eating is important for overall mental and physical health.

6. DRINK CAFFEINE IN MODERATION

Having too much caffeine can make you feel jittery and nervous, which can interfere with your sleep and increase feelings of anxiety.

7. MEDITATION AND BREATHING EXERCISES

Helps to slow down the heart rate and clear the mind. Meditation is a skill that requires practice and might not be for everyone. Other ways you can be mindful might include going for a walk, practising yoga, reading, or other activities that help relax your mind.

8. BE GRATEFUL FOR SOMETHING EACH DAY

Make it a practice to be grateful for anything you like and write it down, perhaps first thing in the morning. By writing down positive things, we can shift from automatic negative thoughts to healthier ones. You may also want to write down things that you have enjoyed during the lockdown and that you would like to continue in the future (eg staying in regular contact with friends, practising meditation or taking the time to prepare a nice meal).

9. STAY CONNECTED

Friends, family and colleagues make a great support network. Sometimes it feels easier to keep our worries to ourselves

and we may even feel guilty or ashamed about them. Engaging with people in our support network can be a powerful way to alleviate stress and may help you problem-solve better. Just talking things through with someone can help us find solutions.

10. ORGANISE YOUR TIME

Make lists, plans and daily schedules. Time management is key to helping you feel in control and able to handle the pressure



**GO TO YOUR GP IF
THINGS ARE GETTING
ON TOP OF YOU.**



Additional support

CHILDNET

Provides [online information](#) for parents around supporting children with gaming at different ages.

- [Family agreement template](#)

CHILDLINE

If you're under 19, you can confidentially call [\(0800 1111\)](#), chat online or email about any problem big or small (opening times: 9am - midnight, every day)

- [Sign up](#) for a free Childline locker (real name or email address not needed) to use their [free 1-2-1 counsellor chat](#) and email support service.
- [Can provide a BSL interpreter](#) if you are deaf or hearing-impaired.
- Hosts [online message boards](#) where you can share your experiences, have fun and get support from other young people in similar situations.

THE MIX

Offers support to anyone under 25 about anything that's troubling them (opening times 4pm - 11pm, every day)

- Email support available via their [online contact form](#).
- Free [1-2-1 webchat service](#) available.
- Free short-term [counselling service](#) available.
- Phone: [0808 808 4994](#)

YOUNGMINDS CRISIS MESSENGER

Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people across the UK experiencing a mental health crisis. Text: YM to 85258

- All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors. Texts can be anonymous, but if the volunteer believes you are at immediate risk of harm, they may share your details with people who can provide support.

MEETOO

A free app for teenagers (11+) providing resources and a fully-moderated community where you can share your problems, get support and help other people too. Can be downloaded from [Google Play](#) or [App Store](#) (not a crisis support).

ASK ABOUT GAMES

[Online information](#) about specific games and age ratings – including short videos parents can watch to give them an idea of a game's content.

YOUNG MINDS

[Young Minds website](#) - a guide for parents about online safety.