
Navigating Teen Mental Health

Saturday, September 27th, 2025

GOALS

1. Hands-On Activity
2. How to ID MH Issues with Our Kids
3. Promoting Wellbeing

BEING A PARENT TODAY IS HARD - HANDS ON ACTIVITY

10:20AM

Parenting, caregiving is one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences you will ever encounter. You are facing:

- Constant responsibility
- Balancing multiple roles
- Experiencing financial pressures
- Navigating developmental and behavioral changes

While also at the same time, living a more full, enriched life with the joys that come from having or caring for children.

To bring us together for this conversation, I think it's important for us to dispel the lies and shame telling you that you are not equipped and not capable of having hard conversations because you are not a "good" parent. The idea of being a "good" parent can create pressure and self-doubt, especially when trying to meet unrealistic standards.

In front of you now is a worksheet, this worksheet is designed to help you **identify the expectations you've held about being a "good" parent**. These might be internal (self-imposed) or external (from family, friends, or society). You are welcome to take the next five minutes to think about or write down:

1. What are some things you believe a "good" parent must always do?
2. Where did these beliefs come from (e.g., your upbringing, media, etc.)?
3. Which of these expectations feel overwhelming or unachievable?

At the end, you will have the option to share whatever pieces you've written down, with the agreement that what we share in here today will be held in the confidence of the circle you are in. So in this time, you are welcome to reflect and see what comes up for you.

(Provide 1 minute warning)

Thank you for taking the time to reflect on these questions, is there anything anyone would like to share about this experience?

I think it is clear that we all can relate to feeling guilty and being hard on ourselves, and one way to approach the guilt and shame is through **self-compassion**. Self-compassion is the practice of extending kindness and understanding to oneself during times of failure or perceived inadequacy. Realizing and accepting that no parent is perfect makes it easier to forgive yourself for the mistakes you make. **Remember that one action does not reflect the love you have for your child.** Give yourself the same grace and kindness you'd offer them when they struggle.

Which leads me into the next part of our conversation: How do you identify mental health concerns for your children or youth in your care?

10:40AM

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS FOR YOUTH

As a parent you know your child best, and you are often the first to notice when they might be having difficulty with their mental health. As a therapist, we would call this knowing your child's "baseline," and noticing when your child moves away from their baseline. You can consider the word baseline as an understanding of what it looks and feels like to be balanced and well in your mind-body-spirit.

It can be challenging to determine how far your child has moved away from their baseline or if they are having a hard time returning to it due to their developmental stage. It is typical for teens to have:

- Increased Moodiness
 - There becomes a shift in concern when the increased moodiness includes Intense - painful - longlasting mood swings; Risky mood-dependent behavior; Self-injury; Suicidal behavior
- Feeling "onstage" with increased self-consciousness
 - Social phobia; Withdrawal; Perfectionism; Unrealistic standards
- Stressful transitions from middle school to high school
 - School refusal; Bullying or being bullied; Lack of connection to social peers

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- Messy room
 - Rotting food; Unable to find basic necessities
 - Sleep cycle shift
 - Up all night - sleep all day
 - Increased desire for privacy
 - Routine lying; Hiding things; Isolation from family and friends
 - Increased parent/child conflict
 - Verbal or physical aggression; Running away

Regardless of your child's age and developmental level, this is a simple formula that can help you open the door to discussions about their emotions.

Observe + Label + Wait = Conversation Starter

1. Observe. Body Language and Actions:

Notice if your child has tears, a smile, or a worried expression. Are they clenching their fists, looking closed off, or seated away from others? Are they slamming cupboard doors? Verbal Cues: *Pay attention to what they are saying - or not saying.* Notice their volume (Is it loud? soft?) and tone of voice (do they sound sad, angry, excited?).

2. Label out loud. Stick-to-the facts:

Describe what you notice to your child. Stick to the observable facts. For example, "I noticed that you have been slumped down and sighing while doing your homework." Emotion Identification: *Suggest an emotion based on your observations but leave space for your child to correct you.*

For example, "It seems like you might be feeling frustrated. Is that right?"

3. WAIT (then Validate).

Silently count to five in your head before saying anything more. This gives your child time to shift their attention and think about their feelings. Allow your child to express their feelings and even correct you (if they are having a different feeling than what you guessed). If they don't want to talk or their emotions are too strong, let them know you will be there when they're ready.

Validate: Listen and acknowledge your child's feelings or needs. You can validate your child's feelings without necessarily agreeing with their actions.

You can track the observations and emotions you are noticing through the worksheet, "Encouraging Emotional Expression." This worksheet also gives you helpful reflection questions and mindfulness strategies to help your child learn how to regulate.

When to Seek Help:

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- When what you have done is no longer working
 - Concerns for your child's mental mood/behavior go on longer than expected
 - When your child's mood/behavior is impacting others to a significant degree
 - You are concerned about suicide or self-harm thoughts or behaviors

10:50AM

WELLBEING

The pillars to your "wellbeing" include your mental, emotional, physical, environmental, spiritual, recreational, and social. You can take each aspect of your wellbeing and rank them from 1-10.

From there, you might pick 1 to 2 areas that you want to focus on. You can ask yourself the question. What would need to happen to improve my chosen area by 1 point? The actions you choose do not need to be drastic, they can be small to help you stay consistent.

The social, includes your connections to your community, and in this time I am going to turn it back over to Catherine to talk about what are some of the resources you have available here in this local community and online.

11:00AM

Catherine