

Understanding Mental Health



Positive Parenting

Promoting the mental health of children and youth is essential to their overall well being. The increased life stressors families face every day can make it challenging to adopt a positive parenting style. Below are some examples of positive parenting techniques.

Develop social skills in your child: The single best childhood predictor of healthy adult functioning is social competence—the adequacy with which a child gets along with others.¹ Social competency and healthy self-esteem go hand-in-hand. This includes modeling and teaching children social skills and behaviors that promote positive social interactions between them and others.

Take the time to talk to your child: When feelings are bottled up they can explode in the form of temper tantrums, bullying, or mood swings. Encourage your child(ren) to talk openly about their feelings and let them know that talking through feelings is a healthy way of expressing anger, fear, sadness, or pain. Provide your child(ren) the vocabulary to express emotions and be a role model by talking about your own feelings.

Celebrate accomplishments: Rewarding child(ren) for good behavior is more important than letting them know when they have behaved inappropriately. For instance, if your child has cleaned up his/her room, but left a pile of toys in one corner, say how impressed you are that the room is clean, rather than scolding your child for neglecting that one pile of toys.

Use discipline, not punishment: According to the National PTA,² discipline teaches children acceptable behavior enabling them to make wise decisions on their own. Rewarding children for good behavior, setting limits, and telling your child(ren) how much you love them promotes self-discipline. Verbal or physical punishment can be harmful to child(ren) possibly leading to low self-esteem.

Leave the stresses of work at work: When parents' job related stress transfers to home life, they are more prone to argue with their children and are less tolerant of their behavior. This may have an adverse effect on a child's self-esteem.³ It is important to first address your own stresses and mental health needs.

Avoid “hyper-parenting”: This parenting style consists of enrolling children in too many extracurricular activities and becoming over-involved in their academic, athletic, and social lives. Children need the time and space to be creative, think and discover things on their own. Hyper-parenting may damage self-esteem, increase the likelihood of depression and substance abuse.⁴

When your child requires discipline, consider the following techniques:

Understanding Mental Health



- **Constructive criticism:** Rather than scolding, tell the child what needs to be done. Focus on the act and not the child. For instance, instead of saying, “You made a mess, you left your toys all over the place,” try, “This playroom is a mess, would you mind cleaning it up?”
- **Redirection:** Help the child replace an unwanted behavior with a more acceptable one. For example, if your child is throwing a ball around in the house, take him/her outside to play with the ball together.
- **Time-outs:** Time-outs should be used as a time for the child to regain self-control, not as a retreat for the adult. Have the child sit towards a wall, free from distractions, for a short period of time. To be effective, time-outs must be used sparingly and appropriately.⁵

Signs of good mental health in children:

- Has friends and gets along with other children
- Can concentrate and focus attention
- Has relatively stable eating and sleeping patterns
- Shows reasonable interest and progress in school
- Satisfied at least some of the time with most aspects of life— family, friends, school, physical appearance
- Does not become anxious or angry over minor inconveniences or setbacks
- Fears are reasonable and not excessive
- Shows respect for other people
- Maintains a reasonable amount of energy throughout the day
- Has hobbies and enjoys in different activities