



A Monthly Insight of Practical Tools to Help Your Family

Wellness Today

For Parents & Families

Warning Signs

Early recognition of your child struggling is key to overcoming challenges. Signs your child may be struggling emotionally include:

- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Mood or behavior changes including appetite and sleep
- Withdrawing or isolating
- Taking excessive risks or behaving recklessly
- Repeated unexplained body aches and pains
- Anxiety interfering with activities
- Frequent anger, irritability, criticizing or tantrums
- Change in academic performance
- Preoccupation with death or dying
- Talking about wanting to die or being a burden

When To Get Help

If your child is not responding to helpful support being offered, not improving or worsening seek help by consulting with a medical or mental health professional.

Knowledge That Makes a Difference

Each month a newsletter will be available with valuable information on ways help your child develop greater emotional wellness, resiliency and skills to handle challenges in life.

Start of School Year Emotions

A new school year can bring many emotions, new opportunities and challenges for students and their families. Helping children and teens develop skills to handle these experiences in a healthy way and with confidence is possible.

To get through these turbulent times, an understanding of the connection between thoughts, feelings and behaviors is helpful. When an event or situation occurs it is the way one thinks about the event that creates the emotions and influences behaviors. When unpleasant or distressing feelings are experienced, it is often because of the way the situation is being interpreted. As individuals develop skills to re-narrate what has

occurred by adding in more accurate information, pieces of information that were disregarded or discounted, options of how to get through the situation can be better seen, more positive feelings experienced and behaviors begin to change.

To increase understanding of experiences and feel more in control help your child tell the story about what's upsetting.

Helping Elementary Age Children

To help child develop this skill Dr. Daniel Siegle, author of *The Whole-Brain Child* recommends, "When your child is upset, connect first emotionally...then once [they are] more in control and receptive, bring in...lessons and discipline." Connecting emotionally can be done through listening, reflecting or repeating back what you heard said through nurturing non-verbal communication such as body position, facial expressions that

How To Get Help

If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally or behaviorally support is available. Begin by talking with a medical doctor or a mental health professional.

Below are resources available in the community to help:

- **Hope Squad** provides resources for parents on talking with children and teens about suicide and mental health, and practical guidance for accessing help. For more information regarding prevention, intervention and postvention visit www.hopesquad.com
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** offers information regarding mental health conditions and support groups for families. www.nami.org
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** (English and Spanish) 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress. 1-800-273-8255
- **Crisis Text Line** is the free, 24/7, confidential text message service for people in crisis. Text HOME to 7417414

reflect the emotions described, eye contact, and appropriate touch such as a hug or touching a shoulder/arm. Refraining from condescending comments or initially trying to teach or discipline is helpful as this will likely be met with resistance due to the reduced brain function of upset children. As children increase feeling heard they are better able to calm down and the brain functioning more receptive to and able to understand teaching, and discipline that may need to occur.

Helping Those In Middle School

For many, identifying thoughts and naming emotions is not natural, however it can be seen through attitude, choices and words. Parents/caregivers can facilitate awareness of thoughts, feelings and connecting behaviors by describing what they observe to their child and ask in a clarifying manner if that is what is occurring. Asking if, rather than telling what, an individual is feeling helps them develop greater ability to name and tame their emotions.

For example, "I see you frowning and not talking much. Are you feeling sad?" As individuals increase recognition and understanding of their feelings, a skill known as emotional intelligence, they will be better able to narrate what occurred, why it is bothering them, problem solve and reduce the level of emotional discomfort.

Helping Those In High School

While the skills discussed in the previous two sections can be helpful for teens, many also experience a high degree of stress at the start of the school year related to peers and pressures of balancing activities such as work, clubs/sports, school work, relationships and family dynamics. Often when stressed or anxious

asking oneself the following three questions can help reduce the intensity of the emotions. Focusing on one concern at a time is important when considering these questions.

1. **What is the worst I fear will happen?** This question can be repeated, "If what I fear happens, then what's the worst I fear will happen next," until the root anxiety producing thoughts are identified.
2. **From 0 to 100% how likely is it my fear will occur?**
3. **If my fear occurs, how can I handle it?** Notice the question is not, "Would I want to handle it?" but "How can I handle it?" Handling it includes utilizing supports and resources to get through the situation.

For many, the likelihood of the stress and worries actually happening as well as how they would get through the situation are not fully considered. As these skills of understanding thoughts and changing the focus is applied stress and anxiety for many decreases.

*Note - The information in this newsletter is a starting place and might not be effective for every child or every situation. Individual counseling can be helpful in adapting strategies to meet individual needs.

This newsletter is produced by Hope Squad, a school-based peer support team that partners with local mental health agencies. Squad members are trained to watch for at-risk students, provide friendship, identify suicide-warning signs, and seek help from adults. Articles contributed by Jessica Williamson, LCSW, who specializes in mental health treatment of children, teens and adults in her private practice located in Utah.