

May 2020: Celebrating Mental Health Month

How to Talk About Mental Health with A Child

Now is a crucial time to check in on the mental health of the young people in our lives. It's important for young people to hear that anxiety, stress, and negative emotions are completely normal — particularly in times of crisis. They also need to hear that there's always hope. In fact, just one positive, nurturing relationship with an adult can help kids fight the effects of trauma.¹

So, if there's a child or teen in your life, now's the time to start a conversation. It doesn't matter if that conversation is in person, by text, or over video. What matters is that you're making yourself available.

"More and more teens are aware of mental health as a real issue they face in their daily lives," says Michael Torres, PsyD, a clinical psychologist at the Kaiser Permanente Mental Health and Wellness Center in San Leandro, California. "It's vital that all of us who support young people are equipped to talk about mental health issues."

Are you ready to talk about mental health with a child or teen in your life? You can start making a difference in a young person's mental health in 3 key ways: [Take care](#), [Talk often](#), [Act early](#).

Take Care

Half of all chronic mental health conditions begin by age 14.² This makes childhood and adolescence a pivotal time to develop coping skills and build resilience. A good place to start: Encourage the child in your life to practice self-care and find a healthy outlet for their emotions. Exercise, especially, has health benefits beyond physical fitness. In fact, as little as 20 to 25 minutes of moderate activity a day has been shown to help protect against symptoms of depression.³ In addition to physical exercise,

For individualized telephone wellness coaching call 1-866-251-4514

Topics include trying to get more active, eat better, manage your weight, quit tobacco, or handle stress, your personal coach can help you create—and stick with—a plan for reaching your goals. You and your coach talk one-on-one by phone convenient a time.



MENTAL HEALTH

Your Mind, Your Body

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kids can also try things like:

- Journaling or making art
- Talking with a trusted friend
- Listening to music
- Watching something fun on television — especially as a family or with a virtual gathering of friends

Taking care also means modeling positive mental health habits for the young people in your life. "It's important we walk the walk," Torres says. "Kids can absorb our anxiety. So, especially right now, let's be kind to ourselves. We can be the best examples of the benefits of good self-care."

Talk Often

It's important to find the right time to talk about mental health with a child. Torres suggests talking one-on-one, whether it's on a walk, during a car ride, or during a video chat. Just make sure they feel comfortable and that you have enough time to fully engage. "Don't pressure them to talk," Torres says, "but let them know that you love them, you're there to support them, and you're not there to judge." Once you're talking, one of the most important steps in building trust with a young person is to respect them enough to be yourself. "Being totally authentic is essential, especially when talking to teens," Torres says. "They'll quickly learn to ignore anything you have to say if they feel you're not being honest and real. But if you're authentic, you're communicating respect."

Act Early

Children of all ages can experience mental health

conditions. In fact, the median age for when anxiety disorders begin is age 6; it's age 11 for behavior disorders and age 13 for mood disorders like depression.⁴ These conditions are treatable, and possibly preventable, with early care and support from trusted adults in these children's lives. And the sooner you familiarize yourself with the [signs and symptoms of depression](#), the better prepared you'll be as a listener.

If you're struggling to relate to a young person's emotions or their condition seems more serious, it could be time to get help. If it's someone else's child, gently let their guardian know what you've noticed. If it's your child, call your pediatrician or a mental health specialist. If health care is a barrier, you could also reach out to the counselor or psychologist at your child's school.

"There's no shame in this," Torres says. "It's the best thing you could do for your child. You're getting them the specialized help they need, the same way you would take them to an eye doctor if their vision was blurry."

And if you ever fear for the immediate safety of a young person, call your local medical office and ask to speak with a crisis provider. "They can guide you through the steps to take to ensure your child's safety and how to access the best and most appropriate intervention available," Torres says. "During this process, you can also be direct with your teen and ask them, 'Are you feeling like hurting yourself?' If the answer is yes, call 911 or take your teen to the nearest emergency room."

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Another recommended source for young people in crisis is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which is available 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255.

Learn More Ways to Talk with Kids About Mental Health

It's never too early to help a young person with their emotional well-being. For more tips and tools, visit [FindYourWords.org](https://www.findyourwords.org), a resource provided by Kaiser Permanente. And to get advice on how to talk with kids about the coronavirus and COVID-19, [watch this video](#).

1. Nicole Spector, , "[How to Talk to Your Kids About Their Mental Health](#)," NBC News, May 20, 2019.
2. "[Mental Health Facts: Children and Teens](#)," National Alliance on Mental Illness, September 2016.
3. Felipe B. Schuch, PhD, et al., "[Physical Activity and Incident Depression: A Meta-Analysis of Prospective Cohort Studies](#)," The American Journal of Psychiatry, April 25, 2018.
4. Kathleen R. Merikangas, PhD, et al., "[Lifetime Prevalence of Mental Disorders in US Adolescents: Results from the National Comorbidity Study-Adolescent Supplement \(NCS-A\)](#)," Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, July 31, 2010.



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Resources Available to Parents

1:1 Wellness Coaching. Talk with a wellness coach over the phone to build your motivation and create a customized plan to make lifestyle changes. [Click here](#) to find out more and set up an appointment

Mindfulness & Stress. Practicing mindfulness means being fully present in the moment. The goal is to be aware of your thoughts and feelings and accept them as they are – which can help you manage your emotions and feel happier and healthier overall.

[Click here](#) for more information and audio recordings to help you practice mindfulness.

[Click here](#) for additional articles on stress and tools to help relax and calm your mind and body.

Call Kaiser San Francisco Health Education Department at (415) 833-3450 to register for online classes or e-mail to find out more: SFHealthEd@kp.org
Hours: Monday - Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Clinical Care. Remember, digital self-care tools aren't meant to take the place of clinical care. If you or your children need help and support, please reach out. Millions of people seek mental health services every year. We offer many options for members with mental health, emotional, and addiction issues. We'll help you find care that works for you.

[Call us](#) and we'll assess your needs and discuss treatment options. You don't need a referral from your doctor to access mental health services. If you think you have a medical or psychiatric emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

myStrength App. This is a cognitive behavioral therapy app that we've used with patients for nearly 2 years. [Click here](#) to watch a 45 second video and learn more about myStrength. Our clinicians reviewed and chose myStrength for adult patients based on its effectiveness. It is uniquely designed to provide personal inspiration, build resilience, and strengthen skills for strong mental health. Interested? [Click here](#) to get started.

National Suicide Hotline: [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255)

