

FAMILY TIMES

Teen Edition

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Moore Public Schools
Mental Health Team



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- Using body and mind to cope
- Saying "no" when needed
- Are you ever triggered by your child?

Listening isn't about being right, proving a point, or teaching a lesson. It's about wanting to understand.

- Kirsten Kobabe

CONNECTION IN CHALLENGES by Deanna Wasson, MSW, LMSW U/S

Studies show that connection plays a key role in positive relationships, communications, and behavior. During a time when your teen is seeking increased independence and activities, it can feel hard to maintain that connection, especially when navigating attitudes, challenges, or behavior. Below are some tips to maintain connection through daily routines.

Practice understanding and empathy. When your teen is struggling with a task or behavior, take the time to find the "why".

- For example, you've asked them to take out the trash twice, but they continue texting on their phone. You could go to them and say, "I know that conversation is important to you, but our trash is full, and we need to be able to use it. Can you take it out, and then follow up with them?" This communicates that you need them to complete their chores, but it also shows that you care about them and what they are experiencing.

Practice boundaries and allow for feelings. When people are upset, we tend to want them to stop their feelings. Instead, allow feelings, but maintain boundaries that may be needed.

- In the example above, your teen may say no or get upset. Take a moment to say, "I know you don't want to do this, and it is okay to be upset. However, this is your chore, and I need you to follow through."

Practice compromises when appropriate. Sometimes, we set a boundary and then someone may offer an alternative solution. Encourage your teen to offer solutions that help solve the problem for both of you.

- If your teen offers a reasonable alternative, take time to consider it, and then explain your answer. They could offer, "Can I finish typing this text, and then I will take care of it?"

Practice repairing the relationship. We all say or do things out of frustration at times, and this can lead to misunderstanding and negative feelings.

- For example, you've yelled at them for not doing what you asked. Take a moment to go to them and genuinely apologize for reacting in such a harsh way. "I'm sorry. It is not okay for me to yell at you or use those words. I was frustrated, and instead of taking a moment to be with you, I acted out of my own feelings. How are you feeling? How can I help? Can we try that again?"

Connection can be established and maintained through difficult moments. Take time to reflect and consider where you can increase your relationship with your teen through everyday tasks and routines.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/newsroom/2019/adolescent-connectedness.html>, <https://yourteenmag.com/family-life/communication/how-to-connect-with-teens>, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/04/health/how-to-resolve-conflict-parenting-wellness/index.html>

TECH TAKEOVER

Tammy Mayer, M.Ed., LPC

Almost every teenager now has an account on at least one social media platform. They utilize social media to connect with friends, share experiences, and tell the world about themselves. But without realizing it, they are managing an addiction. Smartphones and other electronic devices are, by design, addictive. We get a dopamine release in our brain when we pick up our phone or log into social media. Utilizing social apps is essentially priming your brain into thinking you are rewarding yourself every time you pick up your device. However, social media has good intentions, it connects you with people from around the world, showing content that you are interested in, and providing non-stop entertainment. There are negative aspects to that endless scrolling. Research has shown that teens who use social media are three times more likely to suffer from depression, putting a large portion of the population at risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Social media has removed barriers between the user and the audience with far reaching implications. Teens act on impulse and post things to social media that may reflect a feeling or thought in the moment but may not be true a day later. Content can be filtered, edited, and manipulated before its posted. This can lead to unattainable standards. Teens are obsessed with instant gratification and in some instances base their worth off of the images they see and the amount of likes they receive on their post. Facebook recently did a study that found Instagram to have harmful effects among a portion of teens, particularly girls. Instagram makes body image issues worse for 1 in 3 teenage girls. Among teenagers who reported suicidal thoughts, 6 percent in the U.S. was traced back to Instagram.

This is not to say that keeping your teens off of social media will decrease them having suicidal thoughts. This is just a call to parents to be aware of what your teen is doing online. Here are some warning signs to be aware of:

- **If your teen is focused too much on social media where they are not interacting with real-life.**
- **Anxious about post and likes**
- **If your teen's behavior is altered (disinterested in life, not wanting to live)**

Friends are a great ally in the monitoring of social media because they are part of it. No one should write off a post from a friend or family member as "dramatic". If you see something, say something, it could save someone's life. Healthy social media usage can be modeled by a parent. Limiting your time on social media and setting limits on devices can allow you and your teen to unplug and connect in other ways.

Source: Institute, H. M. H. (2022, September 1). *The impact of social media on Teens' Mental Health.* University of Utah Health. Retrieved March 7, 2023, from <https://healthcare.utah.edu/healthfeed/postings/2022/09/social-media-teen-mental-health.php>

Calming Technique



COPING CORNER

Coping Strategies by Courtney Folsom, MSHR, LPC, CRC

When attempting to manage our feelings, moods, emotions, and stress, it can be helpful to use a combined brain and body approach. By looking at managing both our physical and mental responses, it can be beneficial to consider approaching our body and brain in "levels".

Level 1: Body

The first way we need to approach coping is to manage the physical aspects. Learning to recognize and manage body sensations is essential to managing our reactions and handling difficult or challenging situations. Is my heart racing? Am I making a fist? Are my teeth clenched? What is happening in my body? Once we become more aware of our body sensations, the next step is learning to self-regulate. Engaging in breathing exercises and self-regulation techniques can help keep stress and emotions under control.

Level 2: The Mind

The second approach to coping is to recognize what story we are telling ourselves. What thoughts or beliefs are you experiencing around the situation? Examine these thoughts. Are they accurate? Can you challenge them? What is the most reasonable explanation in this situation? Can I view the situation from another perspective? Can I speak to myself in a more encouraging way?

Increasing self-awareness and implementing coping skills and strategies can help us better handle stressful situations life throws our way.

- Take a big breath in.
- Hold it.
- Exhale out as long as you can.
Repeat 3-5 times.

Intentional breathing can be a great tool to help calm yourself. Long exhalations help tell your nervous system you are safe.

When our voices are calmer,
our messages are clearer.
- Phinnah Chichi

Stopping the Stigma

by Candace Ladd, MHR, LPC



The topic of mental health can be so triggering for many. We tend to be far more comfortable talking about our physical health. When we have symptoms that affect the way we feel physically we seek treatment, we ask questions, we talk to friends who have had similar symptoms and experiences, and we dare to listen to our doctors' medical advice and take medication. Why do many of us struggle to do the same when it comes to our mental health? I believe we struggle because of the stigma that has been attached to mental health.

The Oxford dictionary defines stigma as "a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person." When it comes to mental health people often experience shame, have been subject to judgment and ridicule, and sometimes are even viewed as damaged. About 25 years ago I was a hurting teenager. There was much stress in my home, my parents were separated, I had reached my point of rebellion, and my brother had become addicted to drugs. I needed counseling, my whole family needed counseling. However, counseling felt like something only "crazy" people did. As a family we never discussed what was happening, we only survived it. It was not until years later as an adult that I began to heal and seek out help. Seeing a counselor has been life changing. Being able to process past trauma, having someone listen with a nonjudgmental posture, and being told that the things that happened were not okay, was pivotal for me.

So how do we break the stigma and help others begin to heal? Education and open dialogue, hearts, and minds. If we can educate ourselves and others about mental health and how to get help and the resources we need, we will see less severe symptoms and more people healing. If we have conversations about our struggles, we learn that we are not alone and that many people are walking through similar things. If we open our hearts up to those who are struggling with mental illness many people will not feel so rejected and isolated. If we open our minds up to the idea that seeing a counselor or taking medication for depression when needed is taking care of ourselves then we will see lasting change throughout our communities. After all, mental health is health.

According to NAMI:

- People experiencing mental health conditions often face rejection, bullying and discrimination. This can make their journey to recovery longer and more difficult.
- Mental health conditions are the leading cause of disability across the United States.
- Even though most people can be successfully treated, less than half of the adults in the U.S. who need services and treatment get the help they need.
- The average delay between the onset of symptoms and intervention is 8-10 years.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death of youth ages 15-24 and the tenth leading cause of death for all Americans.

If you or someone you know is struggling, you can call or text the NAMI Helpline at 800-950-6264 or dial 988 for the Oklahoma Crisis line.

When we do the work to heal and make sense of our past to improve our mental health, it doesn't only benefit ourselves; it benefits each other, our children, our future children, and our children's children. This is how we change the world. - Rachel Samson

Source: Here are Nami's three steps for being StigmaFree. NAMI. (n.d.). Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <https://www.nami.org/get-involved/pledge-to-be-stigmfree>

Saying No.

by Lori Stuart-Worth MSW, LCSW

Self-care can often be written off as indulgent rather than a practice that honors yourself. In our last issue, we discussed the use of boundaries to protect your time, feelings, and energy. Check it out if you missed it!

So, does saying "no" count as self-care? Absolutely. It's not realistic to say yes to every request.

People often struggle to communicate their needs or say no to requests they may not have the time or ability to complete. We may find ourselves either unable to say no to a request, apologizing and making excuses once we have placed a boundary, or walking back the boundary. The good thing is the use of assertive communication can be practiced and learned.

So where do we begin? It is important to consider our needs just as much as others and then learn to tolerate the discomfort if someone feels inconvenienced.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have the time to accept this request?*
- Am I saying yes to please someone else?*
- Do I feel guilty or obligated?*
- Does this make me uncomfortable or cross my boundaries?*

"When you say no, you are refusing a request not rejecting the person."

There are many reasons why it can be difficult to be assertive. You may be unsure of your own preferences/wants, you may fear what others will say or think about you, or if you deal with feeling not good enough you may want to prove yourself by always saying yes. It's possible your difficulty with assertiveness goes back to a young age.

Practicing assertive communication can improve our mental health and free up our time and emotional energy. This doesn't mean saying no to every ask, but taking a moment to check in with yourself before coming to a decision.

Check out this source article using the QR code below if you need more help considering requests and saying no.



Source: <https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-say-no> and Good Inside by Dr. Becky Kennedy

“Our brains are wired for connection, but trauma rewires them for protection. That’s why healthy relationships are difficult for wounded people” – Ryan North

Feeling Triggered as a Caregiver By Lori Stuart-Worth, MSW, LCSW

We all want the best for our kids, but sometimes kids and caregivers alike have bad days. It can feel exhausting when our kids act out, and we get into a cycle of anger and frustration. **Sometimes, a particular behavior can make us feel excessively upset.** Oftentimes, this response can feel automatic, and we don’t consider what exactly led to how upset we are. When a certain behavior like whining, lack of motivation, disrespect, or being ignored “triggers” us to an immediate reaction of anger or hurt it can mean something else is going on, and it often has more to do with ourselves as opposed to our kids. Anger may be masking another feeling like worry for our child’s wellbeing, or it could be a clue that this has something to do with our own past and history. Triggers can cause us to act in a way that doesn’t feel good to us or our kid or goes against what we value as parents.

ISSUES THAT ARE ROOTED IN OUR PAST IMPACT OUR PRESENT REALITY AND DIRECTLY AFFECT THE WAY WE EXPERIENCE AND INTERACT WITH OUR CHILDREN EVEN WHEN WE’RE NOT AWARE OF THEIR ORIGINS.”

-DAN SIEGEL, FROM PARENTING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Frequently, triggers come from our own experiences. If your child does something you were punished, shamed, or belittled for it can create complicated feelings for us. For example, if you were not allowed to show emotions you may feel annoyed or maybe helpless when your child has big emotions. If you were bullied as a child, it may cause a strong reaction when your child is unkind or does something you think they could be ridiculed for. If your kid is struggling in school- you may feel like a bad parent. Even a positive experience your child has can trigger a response if we were not allowed a similar experience.

It can be helpful in our parenting journey to examine our triggers and become aware of how they are impacting our current relationship with our kids. Are we bringing something from our past into the present? Is this trigger causing you to parent differently than you’d like? Our reactions in these moments can cause unintentional hurt for our kids. Recognizing these triggers in advance can help you prepare a plan to calm yourself before a big reaction. You can also work to identify the message you want to share with your child about a particular situation separate from your strong emotions or reaction— i.e., big emotions are allowed in this house as long as we don’t hurt ourselves or others OR being kind is important to our family, so we don't cause others to feel poorly.

As we move forward, let’s pay attention to moments where we feel extremely hurt, sad, or our reactions feel out of control or out of proportion to the situation. Take some time to reflect and see if these feelings are related to you and not your child. It can be helpful to reflect on how we were parented remembering that our parents were often doing the best they could with the resources they had. Becoming aware of these triggers can help improve your parenting stress and relationship with your child by making sense of common patterns. If you notice there are some unresolved hurts that negatively impact your parenting, it can also be helpful to reach out for help to address these past experiences.

Sources: <https://www.todayparent.com/family/parenting/parenting-triggers/>
<https://onetimethrough.com/what-you-need-to-know-about-parenting-triggers/>

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Mental Health Resources
for more information

<https://www.mooreschools.com/Page/52192>

**Free Apps for
Mental Health and
Wellbeing**

Pacifica

Happify

Calm Harm

*Unique Daily
Affirmations*

Hydro Coach