May/June 2023

# THE COUNSELORS' CONNECTION

The Newsletter of the
Elementary Counseling Department

**What's in this month's issue:**



## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S EXPERIENCE WITH A MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER

Making the decision to seek support from a mental health provider can be a daunting task. Waitlists, costs, and how to fit it all in can make your head spin. Then, once you have secured an appointment and are preparing your child for the initial visit, you may find yourself wondering how to initiate the conversation with your child or explain what to expect. The good news- your child already has a general understanding of a counselor through their interractions with the school counselor. Additionally, you might also find the following suggestions beneficial in preparing your child for working with a mental health provider:

- **Normalize the experience**: Review the different ways your child cares for their body; the dentist keeps their teeth healthy, the pediatrician make sure their body is growing in a healthy way. Identify that thoughts, feelings, and emotions are also important to keep healthy, and there are doctors and counselors to help with that too. If your child tends to be anxious about doctor visits, let them know that there are no shots when you see a "feelings doctor."
- **Prepare your child for what to expect:** If you are unsure what the first appointment will entail, reach out to the provider. Ask if your child will be meeting alone with the provider, or if you will be a part of the initial consultation. Share this information with your child. Explain that the provider will ask questions and their job is to be honest and open. There are no right or wrong answers.
- **Visiting a mental health provider is not a punishment, but rather a gift:** It's an opportunity for your child to talk about their feelings and behaviors with someone who is not going to judge them. The provider will listen and help your child learn strategies to help them feel their best and be their best.

Preparing yourself is also just as important. Here are some tips that may be beneficial for parents and caregivers to remember:

- **Working with a mental health provider is a relationship:** Both you and your child need to feel comfortable with the provider. If this is not the case after a few appointments, know that it is ok to change course. Sometimes it takes a bit to find the right fit.
- **Ask questions:** Some examples of questions may include the expected length of treatment, the goal of treatment, how treatment is provided (method of therapy), and how you as a parent will be informed and included in the progress.
- **Plan how you will relay your concerns:** You will likely be asked to complete intake forms to give the provider a basic understanding of your child's needs and historical experiences. If something is not addressed in the forms or you have additional thoughts that present themselves after you share the completed forms, it is absolutely ok to follow-up with the provider.

# CONTINUED READING FROM PAGE 1

As a final thought, your child spends a large portion of time in school on a daily basis. Mental health providers and schools can work together with you as the child's parent/caregiver to provide consistent messaging and support, and observational data regarding how your child is functioning in the school setting. Your child's school counselor has experience consulting with mental health providers and is able to provide this service with your consent.

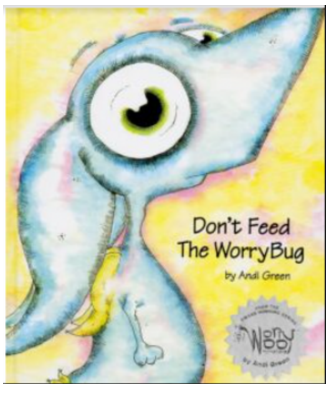
*Preparing for Your Child's First Appointment, Child Mind Institute, October 2021.*
*5 Tips to Prepare Your Child for a Psychology Consultation, Texas Children's Hospital.*

# MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH


***Click here for the SDHT Mental Health Resource Guide***

If you have any questions regarding community mental health resources, please feel free to reach out to your child's school counselor.

# SEL BOOKS OF THE MONTH


Click here to see the full list of children's books about mental health

# GUIDE TO MENTAL HEALTH

With so many different mental health providers out there the choices can be confusing, but they don't have to be. Here is a little cheat sheet of mental health credentials and titles so you can make an informed decision regarding the type of provider you want to work with.

- **Psychiatrist**- A psychiatrist is a medical doctor and will have "MD" after their name. Psychiatrists primarily deal with the physical brain, and as such, they are the ones who diagnose mental illnesses and prescribe psychiatric medication.
- **Psychologist**- a psychologist is also a doctor and will have either Ph.D. or Psy.D. after their name. Psychologists use formal assessments (testing) to help diagnose mental illness. After determining what is wrong, a psychologist will work with you through one or more forms of talk therapy.
- **Counselor/Therapist**- While counselors are able to diagnose people, they typically focus more on working with individuals or groups and engage in various forms of talk therapy. Their goal is to help people overcome mental health challenges, life stress, and other obstacles that are interfering in their lives.

Whichever type of provider you choose, you should look for someone who is licensed. A license shows that the person not only has the required education and experience to provide mental health services, but has also passed an exam in their area of practice.

Click here to learn more about the types of Mental Health Professionals

## DID YOU KNOW?

**SEL lessons include lessons about mental health, coping skills, and seeking help when needed.**