

PEDIATRIC UNIT

Emotional Wellness in Children

Children, teens, and families are navigating through tough times. Sometimes, it can be hard to tell whether day-to-day stress is getting the best of us, or when something more serious may be going on. In either case, talking with your child's pediatrician is a great place to start.

How to Talk About Mental Health with Your Child and Their Pediatrician

Starting the conversation

Many pediatricians check for mental health concerns at [well-child visits](#). The doctor may ask your child questions or ask them to fill out a questionnaire that checks in about how they are doing. As your child gets older, it's important for them to have the opportunity to [talk privately](#) with their pediatrician. This also lets them practice talking with the doctor, which is a skill they will need as a young adult.

As a parent, you can also mention concerns about your child's mental health, either at a well-child visit or whenever concerns arise. It is often a good idea to talk with your child ahead of time. **Consider starting the conversation by assuring, "I care about you and want to make sure I understand how you're feeling. Your doctor is someone who can help."**

What to look for in your child or teen

It is normal for your child to experience difficult thoughts, feelings and emotions. ***When these issues occur more than usual and begin to get in the way of regular functioning, it could be a sign of something more serious.***

Here are some [signs](#) to look for that may signal the need for additional support:

- Feeling "on edge" or "wound up" most of the time
- Worrying about things for no reason or having negative thoughts that are hard to control
- Feeling panicky or having physical symptoms like headaches, stomach pains, rapid breathing, fast heartbeat, or diarrhea
- Avoiding activities because of fear or [anxiety](#)
- Changes in [sleep habits](#) (trouble sleeping or being tired during the day)
- Changes in eating habits (eating too much or too little)
- Being quick to give up on challenging tasks



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- Struggling with schoolwork
- Spending more time alone
- Feeling sad or irritable
- Feeling guilty about things
- Talking about death or [suicide](#)

How your child's pediatrician can help

Talk with your child's pediatrician if you have noticed signs or symptoms that concern you. Even if you are just wondering if something is "normal" for your child's developmental level, your child's pediatrician is an ideal source of support.

Your child's pediatrician can also help you sort out whether talking with a mental health professional may be a good idea. They can help determine which issues they can support in their office versus when to see other mental health professionals, such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, or licensed professional counselor.

What else can parents do?

Even though mental health concerns are common, they may still carry a stigma in our society. ***Help fight this stigma by letting your child know that you love and support them, no matter how they are feeling. Let them know that we all sometimes struggle, and that help is available.***

As with other conditions, your child's pediatrician is a trusted source of information who can help you and your child through challenging times.

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide and seeking emotional support, there are crisis lines available via phone, chat, or text:

- **If you or someone you know is currently experiencing thoughts of suicide, or a mental health or substance use crisis, please call 988 to reach Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and speak with a trained crisis specialist 24/7.**
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 800-273-8255 (TALK)
- [Crisis Text Line](#): Text IN to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis counseling.
- [Trevor Project Lifeline](#) (confidential suicide hotline for LGBTQ+ youth): 866-488-7386

If a suicide attempt has occurred, call 911 immediately or go to a nearby hospital emergency room.

Should a situation arise in which your child needs to be admitted to a hospital, remember that Hendricks Regional Health's dedicated pediatric unit is staffed 24/7 to care for children from birth to 18 years. Learn more at hendricks.org/pediatrics.