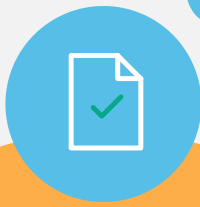


HEALTHY EMOTIONAL REGULATION checklist



FIRST Steps

- ☐ BREATHE! Have a go-to breathing skill.
- ☐ Notice your body. Where do you feel the emotion?
- ☐ Picture your "happy" place.
- ☐ Take a time out! Have a seat. Give yourself a minute to refocus.



ACCEPT the emotion

- ☐ Put a name to the emotion.
- ☐ Rate the intensity of the emotion 1-10.
- ☐ Regulate, don't suppress or ignore.
- ☐ Don't judge yourself of the emotion. It just is!



MANAGE your stress

- ☐ Get enough sleep, exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet.
- ☐ Practice Self Care: hobbies, friends, nature, pray, meditate.
- ☐ Talk to a professional.



SOOTHE your senses

- ☐ Put a candy, mint, gum in your mouth. TASTE it!
- ☐ SMELL IT: calming essential oil, candle, air freshener, breathe it in!
- ☐ Put on a warm sweater, stand in front of the fan, release the tension from your shoulders. FEEL it!
- ☐ Put on some calming music, favorite feel good song. LISTEN!

10 Reasons to Schedule a Therapy Appointment for Your Child

1. Pleas for Help

Young children through adolescents often know they are not well. If your child asks for mental health help or is frequently visiting the school counselor or nurse, it might be a good idea to schedule an initial evaluation with a counselor.

2. Changes

If you have a child who usually enjoys spending time around the family but is retreating to their room every day after school and avoiding interactions, you should ask some questions. While the desire for independence may result in a student enjoying more “alone” time, it should not be a stark difference or total withdrawal.

Additionally, a child who is normally quite agreeable but suddenly becomes very angry or accusatory may be struggling. The outbursts are a desperate plea for help. Another area of change to look for is a complete change in social group or recreational activities. For example, a student who changes friend groups or no longer wants to participate in sports may have an underlying issue causing the sudden change.

3. Self-Harm or Abuse

Unexplained or brushed-off explanations regarding scratches, bruises, or other physical injuries can be a sign of a need for support and intervention.

4. Bullying

Listen to your child. If they are frequently talking about others who are antagonizing them, making fun of them, making them feel uncomfortable, or being mean to them, you should intervene and seek help.

5. Heightened Emotions

Heightened emotions can be a sign of anxiety or worry. A child’s coping skills may be reduced if they have an issue they cannot deal with independently. Irritability, restlessness, or anger that does not match the instigating event may indicate the child needs counseling support.

6. School Concerns

A decline in grades or an increase in school discipline should be seriously considered as a factor when deciding if counseling support is needed. Calls from concerned teachers, coaches, or school administrators should be considered seriously.

7. Not Functioning

A child who is frequently truant, late, or unable to participate in school/school activities at a level comparable to peers may indicate a need for an evaluation or counseling care.

8. Trauma

A child who has experienced trauma may need intervention from a helping professional to minimize the adverse effects of the traumatic event. Unresolved or repressed trauma can lead to future difficulties and a lack of overall emotional and physical wellbeing.

9. Abnormal Sleep Patterns

Changes in sleep patterns should be considered a probable reason to pursue therapy. A child who is sleeping or sleepy during normal waking hours may need help. A child who is having difficulty falling asleep, maintaining sleep, or resting may need support. Night terrors, a fear of falling asleep, or bad dreams can also be signs of a need of support.

10. Parental Instinct

As a parent, never underestimate your “gut feelings.” If you feel something is wrong, even if your child assures you they are fine, seek help. You are your child’s best support system and likely know them better than anyone.

Disclaimer: These are general guidelines, not absolutes. If you feel your child is unwell emotionally, take steps to intervene. Call a mental health professional or a pediatrician for an evaluation and recommendations. It is always best to err on the side of caution when mental health needs may be present.



The Gifted Learner and Mental Health Challenges

Heather Lambert, LPC CSC





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Current Perspectives in Mental Health



In 2021, national organizations declared children's mental health an emergency. Current perspectives in mental health are shifting and educators, caregivers, and medical professionals are considering:

- ▶ Eliminating the silos between physical health and mental health to promote better outcomes.
- ▶ The impact of the pandemic on adolescent depression, anxiety, and suicide rates.
- ▶ The link between mental health and academic achievement.

Mental health, much like physical health, impacts academic performance, social connectedness, and emotional wellbeing.

Current perspectives in mental health are shifting as the concern for children's health becomes an urgent priority. Educators, parents, and medical professionals are actively seeking solutions to ensure our children can thrive and achieve wellness.



Mental Health and the Gifted Learner

Mental health challenges for gifted learners include four historical considerations:

1. unhealthy perfectionism
2. anxiety
3. depression
4. suicidality

The impact of the pandemic has exacerbated these concerns. A neurodiverse framework and an understanding of the stages of development can help educators and caregivers better understand how to support gifted learner.

$$\text{Demands} \text{⚡} \text{Resources} = \text{Stress}$$

Educators and caregivers not only feel the increased demands to meet the challenges of supporting gifted learners, but also frequently report feeling ill-equipped with resources to support these unique needs. The resulting stress can strain relationships, challenge workforce needs, and further compound the risks for gifted learners. Adjustments, additional training, and connection to resources can help meet the demands and decrease stress for students, caregivers, and educators.

Achieving Students



Mental Health Concerns

- Difficulty saying "no"
- Difficulty acknowledging the need for help
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Lack of presence, focus
- Decreased social connectedness
- Achievement tied to self worth



Mental Health Supports

- Boundaries with commitments
- Mental Health "check-ins"
- Scheduled down time
- Social skills training
- Awareness of impact of comparisons
- Exploration of personal values
- Strengths focused discussions, explorations

Underachieving Students



Mental Health Concerns

- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of alienation
- Distractibility
- Fear of Failure
- Fear of Success
- Negative attitude toward school
- Self critical, guilty feelings



Mental Health Supports

- Defining personal success
- Balanced focus on social and emotional needs as compared to academic performance
- Scheduled down time
- Social skills training
- Awareness of inner critic
- Exploration of academic needs, interests
- Strengths focused discussions, explorations
- Clarified and managed expectations

Selective Achieving Students



Mental Health Concerns

- Identity Confusion
- Resistance to authority of educators, caregivers, coaches
- Feelings of boredom
- Obsessive focus on preferred subjects
- Impulsivity
- High stress



Mental Health Supports

- Attainment values explored
- Understanding and identifying interests
- Awareness of personal goals
- Choices
- Respect for communicated needs
- Distress tolerance training
- Self-guided learning, independent study projects
- Personality profile

Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson

A framework of neurodiversity can help expand the definition of "normal" development. Educators and caregivers may benefit from an improved understanding of the conflict between psychosocial needs of the individual and the conflict with the needs of society. Special consideration should be given to the intersection of educational and social systems and the basic virtue of the stage of development.

| Stage | Psychosocial Crisis | Basic Virtue | Age |
|-------|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Trust vs Mistrust | Hope | 0-18 mos |
| 2 | Autonomy vs Shame | Will | 18 mos-3 yrs |
| 3 | Initiative vs Guilt | Purpose | 3-5 |
| 4 | Industry vs Inferiority | Competency | 5-12 |
| 5 | Identity vs Role Confusion | Fidelity | 12-18 |
| 6 | Intimacy vs Isolation | Love | 18-40 |
| 7 | Generativity vs Stagnation | Care | 40-65 |
| 8 | Integrity vs Despair | Wisdom | 65+ |



Psychosocial Stages of Development

Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages focus on each individual's identity and development through social experiences. This framework can help us understand the inner struggles during each stage of development. While many gifted learners progress rapidly in educational achievement, the social stressors may prohibit a felt sense of wellness. If we can expand the idea of normal development to a broader range of achievement while understanding the importance of social connectedness, gifted learners may feel better understood, supported, and included.

How can an understanding of the psychosocial developmental stages be helpful?

- Expand the definition of "normal"
- Awareness of trauma regressions
- Development of resilience
- Normalization of successes and failures
- Acknowledge social sources of stress
- Hold space for the complexity of life
- Allow the idea of collective trauma and developmental impact
- Accept changing, evolving values



Conversation Guidelines

To best support the mental health of gifted learners, the topic of conversation must be normalized and ongoing. These guidelines can help get the conversation started:

- **Talk about physical health and mental health.**
- **Listen and reflect what you heard before you add new information.**
- **Keep the conversation age appropriate.**
- **Be real. Be honest. Admit if/when you are uncomfortable.**
- **Apologize if you are at fault. Normalize mistakes/failure.**
- **Manage your expectations. Communicate your expectations. Be willing to adjust.**
- **Seek help when needed.**

| Avoid | Instead |
|---------------------------|---|
| Comparisons | Normalize. It is normal to feel..... <i>stress, desire to achieve, struggles, fears, strong emotions.</i> |
| Minimizing | Empathize. "I am so sorry." "That must be difficult for you." |
| Platitudes Assumptions | Ask questions. Don't assume. "What is the hardest part about _____ for you?" |
| Reframing too soon | Sooth senses. Play music, dim lights, use a lamp, diffuse essential oils, have sweet or salty "treats", blankets/pillows, fidget tools |
| Business as usual | Create containers. Allow free time to write, draw, color, rest, play, explore, connect. |

Conversation Starters

To best support the mental health of gifted learners, keep mental health on ongoing topic of conversation.

These conversation starters can help you find a place to begin.

| Concern | Conversation Starter |
|---------------------|--|
| Stress | On a scale of 1-5, what is your stress level? What do you do to decrease your stress? Feel better? Take a break? |
| Anxiety | What is bothering you most right now? If I could grant one wish, what would you wish for? What are you most afraid of today? |
| Depression | Do you know what is bothering you? Are you feeling sad? About what? Do you sometimes wish you were not alive? |
| Suicidality | Are you thinking of killing yourself? Are you thinking of hurting yourself? Have you ever hurt yourself? |
| Bullying | Does anyone bother you at school? Has anyone hurt you at school? Have you seen anyone be bullied? |
| Social Isolation | Do you have someone to sit with/talk to at school? Who are your friends? What do you do with them? What students in your class/school are most like you? Who do you look forward to seeing at school? in class? |
| Low self-worth | What do you like best about yourself? What makes you special? What do other people say is the best part about you? |
| Performance Anxiety | What will happen if you are not successful? What part worries you the most? Who will be disappointed if you do not achieve _____? |

Additional Resources:

YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Heather Lambert, LPC CSC
Heather is available for training and consulting.
www.heatherlambert.org
heather@clearhopewellness.com
281-760-8454

Mental Health Counseling
Clearhope Counseling & Wellness Center
www.clearhopewellness.com
281-769-2238
Houston office-locations & telemental health in Texas available.



Additional Resources:

<https://www.clearhopewellness.com/mental-health-resources>

988: <https://988lifeline.org/>

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use/mental-health-crisis-services/suicide-prevention>

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