



Family Guide to Supporting Young People's Mental Health and Well-Being

INFORMATION, TIPS, AND RESOURCES

Promoting the mental health awareness and wellness of our K–12 families



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> "Mental health is an important topic for youth today because of how much it affects their development, lifestyle, and overall well being.
>
> *—CA high school student*

> "This guide provides insight for parents regarding mental health and what it is, howthey can help, and what resources are available.
>
> *—CA high school student*

Introduction

Over the last few years, the mental health crisis impacting young people has steadily intensified.[1] However, families, schools, and community partners can work together to support young people's mental health and well-being. Schools and other education organizations can provide personal support, resources, and information to students—and their parents or other caregivers—to help with at-home strategies to support their children.



The purpose of this guide is to provide parents and other caregivers with information and easy-to-use strategies to support their children's overall well-being and mental health. The guide also includes warning signs to look for in children and teens, tips for talking to them about their mental health, and resources for getting help.





Parents and caregivers—*you are not alone!*

This guide is to help you support the children and youth in your life. But if you are struggling with your own well-being, please reach out for help. We all need support—and we can be better caregivers when we get it. Here are some ideas:

- Talk to a friend you trust.
- Ask your child's school counselor or social worker for referrals for professional individual or family counseling or parent support groups.
- Contact your county's mental or behavioral health department for resources.
- If you care for a child with disabilities, contact your regional Parent Center (www.parentcenterhub.org).
- Call 211 for help with basic needs and to connect with a range of local resources.
- Connect with Cal-HOPE by calling 833-317-HOPE (4673) or text chat with someone live online at calhopeconnect.org. (Find more resources to support mental wellness at .)
- See the many free resources available online and in your community at the end of this guide.

If you are ***worried about your child*** harming themselves:

- **DO** let them know you're concerned.
- **DO** remain calm for both of you (so they don't worry about you and so they feel comfortable sharing).
- **DO** ask them if they are thinking about suicide or hurting themselves (this won't give them any new ideas).
  - » **Try:** "I'm worried about you. Are you thinking about hurting yourself? Many people have these thoughts. You won't be in trouble if you are—I just want to help you feel better. I love you."
- **DO** call or text 988 (national suicide and crisis lifeline, available 24 hours a day)
  - » Also see other crisis support services in the Resources section at the end of this guide.
- **DON'T** leave them alone.
- **DON'T** wait to ask for or get help—it's a common problem, and people make it through hard times.

UDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

What is mental health?

Mental health is an important aspect of *everyone*'s overall health and well-being.

There are many terms related to mental health:

social–emotional learning
well-being
mental wellness
psychology
behavioral health
counseling
social and emotional health
resilience

Mental health is "the way your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors affect your life."[2] Positive mental health involves both high levels of well-being and low levels of distress.[3]

(Adapted from Moore et al., 2023[4]; Suldo & Romer, 2016[5])



Well-Being
Sense of belonging, social and emotional skills, happiness, etc.

Distress
Trauma response, anxiety, depression, etc.

Have a family conversation!



We all have different ideas about mental health.

How might our culture, beliefs, identities, values, experiences, and language influence how we:

- **Think and talk about mental health?**
- **Socialize and support each other?**
- **Experience happiness?**
- **Manage stress?**
- **Seek out help or treatment?**

Don't let concerns about the stigma of mental health issues get in the way of seeking help!

> "This is a really important topic, and as a young person I value how impactful it is to have parents in my life who care about my mental health and are doing everything they can to support it.
>
> *—CA high school student*

Many things impact our health and well-being

Where and how young people and families live, work, play, and learn can influence their health, including their mental health.

Providing safe and supportive environments can help children foster:

- **A sense of belonging**
- **High self-esteem**
- **Feeling and being safe**

Mental health can be positively impacted when caregivers and schools work together to make sure young people have what they need to be healthy, happy, and ready to learn, such as:



- Supportive, nurturing relationships with family, friends, and others
- A positive school climate
- Stable and safe housing and nutritious food
- Meaningful and engaging academic instruction
- Support in developing social and emotional skills
- Access to:
  - » Green spaces
  - » Activities of interest
  - » Health care, including mental and behavioral health care

Mental health can be negatively impacted by stressors, such as:

- » Community, school, and family violence
- » Inequalities, racism, and discrimination
- » Physically and/or emotionally unsafe schools
- » Isolation and a lack of community and social support
- » Financial insecurity, housing instability, and hunger
- » Limited access to health care and other basic services
- » Substance use by the person or family members
- » Natural disasters, including pandemics and weather events

Traumatic experiences and ongoing stress are common and can negatively impact the health and well-being of children and teens both in the short term and over a lifetime.[6] During the COVID-19 pandemic, young people experienced increased stressors, resulting in a greater need for mental health supports and services.[7]



Myths About Mental Health

Myths (false beliefs) about mental health can be confusing and make it hard for young people and families to get the help they need. The following are some common myths[8] that can create stigmas, along with the actual facts behind those myths.

Myth: Children can't experience mental health challenges.

Fact: Half of mental health challenges show their first signs before age 14.

Myth: People with mental health challenges are weak and not working hard enough to change.

Fact: Many factors can cause mental health challenges, including genetics, brain chemistry, life events, and family history.

Myth: Nothing can be done to help someone with mental health challenges.

Fact: People with mental health challenges can get better and even recover completely. Therapy, medication, and a strong support system can all help.

Myth: If a child needs to see a counselor/ mental health professional, it reflects poorly on their family.

Fact: Many children benefit from mental health supports. The need for assistance is NOT because of parenting style or skills.

As they grow up, it is not unusual for children and teenagers to experience a range of social, emotional, and behavioral struggles. With support from family, they can often learn the coping skills to get through these challenges. However, these struggles may sometimes involve more serious mental health issues, which can generally be improved through professional support and treatment.

Remember: *It's OK to ask for help!* And keep in mind that the earlier supports and interventions are provided, the better.

Parents can help children and youth understand that we all feel sad, anxious, self-conscious, and frustrated at times. Sometimes just knowing that these emotions are shared by others and knowing that they are being listened to can bring some relief.

The most common emotion that can feel difficult is anxiety.



Other words for "anxiety": **worry**, **stress**, **nervousness**

What are young people often anxious about?

- How they are doing in school and other activities
- What peers and adults are thinking about them
- Their changing bodies
- Their future (e.g., school, career, money, happiness)
- Their safety (e.g., bullying, neighborhood violence, school shootings)
- The world (e.g., the environment, their rights, war)

Another common struggle for youth (and adults) is feeling depressed. Depression can involve some of the following characteristics:



- Sadness
- Low energy
- No motivation
- Lack of interest in doing things
- Hopelessness

Many young people also experience other negative emotions, like irritability, frustration, sadness, embarrassment, and a feeling of being overwhelmed.

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When to seek support



Although temporary anxiety, sadness, and mood changes are common, it's important to be aware when a young person may be experiencing something deeper and more serious. Some behaviors that might indicate that a child or teenager may need extra support include:

- Long periods of negativity or sadness
- Recurring worries about routine parts of everyday life
- New or unusual fears
- Irritability or temper tantrums
- Trouble concentrating
- A drop in grades or skipping school
- Withdrawal from family or social activities
- Avoidance of difficult or new situations
- Chronic complaints about stomachaches or headaches
- Repeated reassurance-seeking
- Sleep problems
- Not being able to get out of bed
- Restlessness or hyperactivity
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Substance use (alcohol, medication prescribed to someone else, street drugs)

Mental health is not something that can be "fixed" right away. It's a process, and often an uneven one. Just like physical health, mental health can benefit from an evaluation, supports that are matched to the needs, and time to reflect and heal.

Most people will benefit from mental health support at different times in their lives. It is also important for adults to address their own mental health struggles and trauma in order to better care for the youth in their lives.

If caregivers notice some of these behavioral changes (above) or notice that their children's emotions or behaviors are getting in the way of having satisfying relationships, they should consider getting professional help from:

- A mental health specialist at school (social worker, psychologist, counselor)
- A therapist or psychiatrist in the community
- The family doctor

ADVOCATE!

If your child or family needs help:

Let your school and/or doctor know why you are concerned about your child. Share what you are seeking as a parent.

Ask your school and/or doctor whether they recommend assessing your child's behavior, learning, or mental health to determine the supports and services they may need.

Ask a lot of questions when seeking help (counselors and therapists will share information about things like confidentiality and their approach to treatment).

Let counselors and therapists know when something is not working—and know that it can take several tries to find the right mental health professional for you or your child.

Something to know: In addition to other health issues, Medi-CAL and other insurers cover certain mental and behavioral health treatments.

How common are mental health issues among youth today?

Mental health problems and emotional struggles are common and increasing.

In 2019, more than a third of adolescents in the United States had persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness (even though fewer than 10% were ever diagnosed with depression or anxiety).[9]

The most common mental health disorders diagnosed among young people are:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- Behavior problems

> "The more students learn about taking care of their mental health, the more they are able to enjoy the things that make childhood unique and special.

> "Poor mental health not only impacts academic performance but physical health, relationships, and overall happiness.

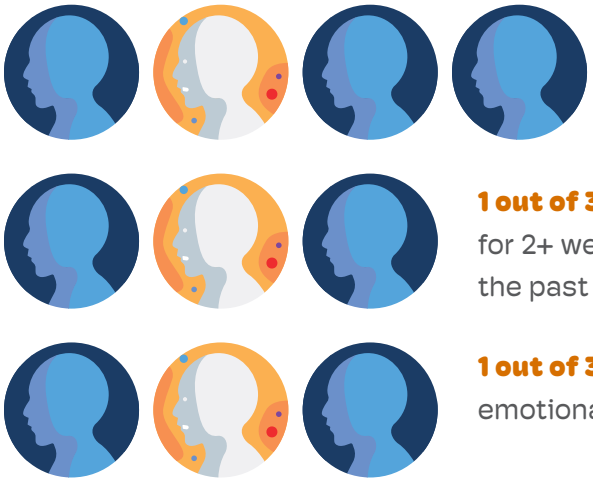
What are students saying about their mental health needs and supports?[10]

2021–22 survey results from California 5th graders:

1 in 5 felt very lonely, **1 in 5** felt sad, **1 in 3** felt stressed

However,

2021–22 survey results from California middle and high school students:



1 out of 4 students reported they would not know what to do if they felt very sad, stressed, lonely, or depressed

1 out of 3 secondary students felt so sad or hopeless for 2+ weeks that they stopped doing usual activities in the past year

1 out of 3 secondary students experience social/ emotional distress in the past month



16% of secondary students had seriously considered suicide in the past year.

The most commonly selected barriers to seeking mental health care if students were feeling very sad, stressed, lonely or depressed:

- **28% – Counselor/therapists wouldn't understand**
- **27% – Parent/guardian might find out**
- **22% – People would think there's something wrong with me**
- **19% – Other students might find out**

The importance of a caring adult:

About 70% of students said they think it would help someone their age feel better to talk to an adult, but 40% said they did not have an adult they could talk to about their problems.[11]

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So what can parents do?

- Let your children know that **they can talk to you** or that you will connect them to someone they would feel comfortable talking with, such as another family member, a mental health professional, a religious counselor, a medical doctor, or a school social worker.



- The next section in this guide offers many more ideas about how parents and caregivers can help the young people in their lives with mental wellness at home.

How do young people change socially and emotionally as they grow older?

As your child develops, you will see changes in how they manage their emotions and relationships with others. Some examples of common behaviors at different ages are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Social and Emotional Development by Age

Age group	Developing behaviors and skills
3–4 years old	• Separates more easily from parents or caregivers • Shows care or affection for family and friends • Shows a range of emotions
5–8 years old	• Knows what is real versus make-believe • Seeks to be liked and accepted • Shows care or concern for the feelings of others
9–12 years old	• Controls and expresses emotions • Forms strong, important friendships • Starts to understand own strengths and weaknesses • May still focus thinking on themselves
13–18 years old	• Uses problem-solving skills, but does not always make the best choices • Seeks independence from family • Tries out and builds unique identities and interests • Can show big emotions and have frequent mood swings

Positive social and emotional development helps youth succeed in school and life. This development includes being able to:

- express and manage emotions;
- form positive and rewarding relationships;
- set goals and plan ahead;
- problem-solve and make good decisions;
- build self-awareness and confidence; and
- understand the emotions and viewpoints of others.

How can schools support your child's mental health and well-being?



Schools play a key role in supporting students' well-being. They provide safe and supportive environments where students learn, grow, and develop relationships. School is also where students and their families are likely to receive—or be connected to—mental health supports.

- There are a lot of ways that schools and family caregivers can work together.
- Schools provide many different types of mental and behavioral health supports and services to students and families. The table *on page X* lists some of these supports and highlights ways that parents and other caregivers can build on these services to support their children.

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Table 2. How Schools and Families Can Support Youth Well-Being

How schools help	How families can collaborate with schools
Create a positive learning environment	Ask what their child likes about their school and what is missing
Celebrate families in different ways	Let teachers and other school staff know they are appreciated
Find out what caregivers value and want for their children at school	Inform their child's school about what their child needs in order to be successful
Teach social and emotional skills and let families know what these skills are so they can practice at home	Use these social and emotional strategies at home
Make everyone aware of why mental health is important	Ask their child what they are learning about mental health in school
Connect students and families directly to mental health providers or counselors at school or in the community	Contact their school to request services for their child
Work with community partners to help connect families to services such as food, housing, and after-school care	Let their school know if they need help and services

ADVOCATE!

If you have concerns about your child, contact your school for help. Schools work with parents to develop a plan of support, which may include school-based mental health supports, learning accommodations at school (through an individualized education plan [IEP] or a 504 plan), and/or mental health treatment or other services in the community. Developing this plan of support may involve some assessments to better understand what is going on with your child.

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WHAT CAN PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS DO TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S MENTAL WELLNESS?

Understanding a child's mental health needs is not as simple as knowing their physical needs, such as food, shelter, and medical care. Yet a child's mental health is just as important as their physical health. [12] Caregivers can help provide a foundation for mental wellness by giving children:

- Love, security, and acceptance
- A safe and secure environment
- Encouragement to build self-confidence and strong self-esteem
- Chances to spend time with friends and family
- Caring guidance and realistic rules

If your child is moving back and forth between households, do your best to bring everyone together to communicate and support them in a collaborative way; a family counselor can help facilitate conversations, which can be difficult when two families are raising one child.

There are many things parents and other family members can do on a day-to-day basis to help support their children's well-being, such as model self-care; communicate about feelings, strengths, and needs; create family routines; develop social and emotional skills; and support mental health through physical health.

1 **Model Self-Care**

2 **Communicate About Feelings, Strengths, and Needs**

3 **Create Family Routines**

4 **Develop Mental Wellness Skills**

5 **Support mental health through through physical health**

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1 Model Self-Care

Children watch what their older family members do and learn from them. And just like adults, children need time to care for themselves, but may not know how. So it's important for parents and other adults to model self-care—which is anything you do to help yourself feel physically, mentally, and emotionally well. These are some ways to practice self-care:

- Plan for quiet time each day.
- Make time for things you enjoy.
- Talk about the things you (and your child) appreciate and value.
- Exhibit grace—show that it is OK to make mistakes, that you are compassionate with yourself when wrong, and that you apologize when appropriate.
- Share with your child when something is scary for you and you are being courageous.
- Show resilience (the ability to persevere or bounce back) by acknowledging that something is hard and showing how you are getting through it or trying again.
- Manage stress by taking a break, going for a walk, or breathing slowly and deeply.
- Take care of your health—get enough rest, eat well, and exercise.
- Name your emotions to help you communicate about feelings.
- Seek professional help if you're struggling. This also shows your children that it is OK to ask for help outside the family.

Plus, if you do these kinds of things to take care of yourself, you will also find that you are more likely to be present with your child.

2 Communicate About Feelings, Strengths, and Needs[13]

Be Ready to Listen!



Let your child know they can safely share or ask you about anything. Create space for listening. Then be patient. Check back over time. They may not want to talk *now*, but it is important for them to know that they can come to you.

> "Oftentimes youth need grace and space to navigate what they are experiencing and decide for themselves what they need. Youth do not always need to be told what they need or how to be teenagers."
>
> *—California high school student*

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Certain communication practices can help build children's self-esteem and self-efficacy.

- Emphasize and recognize your child's strengths.
- Use open-ended questions (can't be answered with just "yes" or "no").
- Listen with full attention, without interruption (and pause for 3 seconds before responding).
- Talk about values—theirs and yours.
- Ask about their hopes and dreams for the future.
- When your child has a problem, don't jump to "fixing"—instead, ask them what they would like help with.
- Avoid labels with your children (jock, nerd, popular, etc.).
- Encourage self-expression through journaling, talking, and engaging in hobbies/interests.

Also encourage a growth mindset by asking your child: What have you gotten better at with practice?

Practice talking about emotions and mental health.

- When your child is upset, acknowledge that and help them name their feelings.
- Help your children check in and learn how to describe their feelings (helpful tools for this include the Feelings Thermometer and Emotion Wheel).
- Assure your child that mental health challenges are similar to other medical conditions and are not their fault. Remind them that we can get care to help us improve.
- Start conversations with your child, using questions like these:[14]
  - What can each of us do when we feel [mad, sad, angry, scared]?
  - How can we calm down?
  - What was a time when you felt scared or anxious but went forward anyway?
  - When you want to give up, what's one thing you can tell yourself?

Laugh at your own small mistakes or goofs with kindness!

Key Parenting Communication Skill!

Validation lets your child know that you hear them and accept their thoughts and feelings (even if inside you don't yet understand or agree). Providing validation will make your child will feel safe and valued.

HOW? Listen without judgment, pause, try to understand, and ask what they are feeling if they haven't named it yet. When your child is done sharing, make statements like, "It makes sense that you feel _____. That sounds like a tough situation."

3

Create Family Routines[15]

Parents can also help with their children's mental wellness by making routines part of each day. Children often feel safe and benefit from knowing what to expect and taking part in activities that occur regularly. Have your child create schedules with you to build their skills and buy-in.

Figure 1. Four Key Steps for Creating Family Routines

Identify	Explain	Follow	Praise
List important daily activities and the order or times they should happen	Make sure children know what they should do and when Use simple charts or pictures as reminders	Make sure all family members follow the routines Remind children of the routines	Praise children when they follow the routines

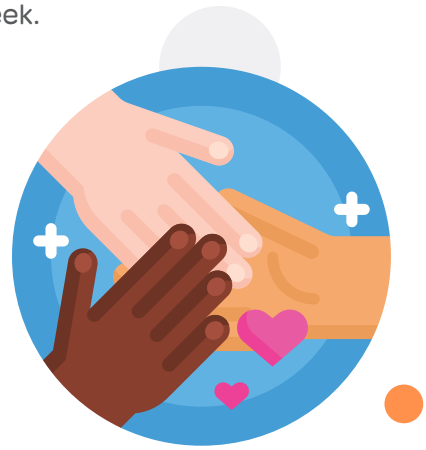
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TIP: For both physical and mental wellness, a regular sleep schedule with enough hours of sleep is important for children and youth. Going to sleep and waking up around the same time each day can improve mood, physical health, and readiness to learn. To help with falling asleep, turn off screens at least one hour before bedtime!

Teens still benefit from organization and routines, but can better manage their priorities and time on their own.

Family Routines to Help with Connection and Well-being:

- Plan family dinners.
- At these meals, create a tradition of going around the table and having everyone share something they learned or were excited about that day. Or share "a rose and a thorn"—something good and something hard from the day or week.
- Block out time for family activities that each person takes turns choosing.
- Take walks outside and notice nature (even leaves on a tree on a city street).
- Have a weekly family game night.
- Keep up with family traditions.
- Listen together and sing along with joyful music!



4 Develop Mental Wellness Skills

Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness practices include being aware of the present moment and noticing thoughts, sensations, and the environment—without judgment. These practices can improve self-awareness of thoughts and feelings, which in turn can affect one's actions. They can also increase calmness and attention.[16]

- Ask your child to take a moment to simply notice how their body feels before they start their homework or if they seem to be getting upset.
- To help them become present in the moment, ask your child to name something using each of their senses: What do they see? Hear? Smell? Taste? Feel?

Gratitude Practices



- Expressing gratitude can help increase positive feelings.
- Create a habit of family members sharing at the dinner table about something they are grateful for.
- Ask your child to start a gratitude journal and write down each night at bedtime something very small and something bigger they are grateful for.

Relaxation and Breathing Practices

- Relaxation and breathing techniques can help calm the body and mind.
- Ask your child to do a progressive muscle relaxation activity with you—squeeze and hold the muscles in one part of your body (e.g., foot, fist, arm, belly, face) for a count of 5, then fully relax them and notice the difference; then do different muscles until all body parts are done.
- Breathe with your child, especially to help them calm down or focus on the present. Here are some breathing practices:
  - Belly breaths: Put your hand on your belly and feel it move in and out.
  - Focus on the exhale: Breathe out slowly and for longer than you breathe in.
  - Box breath: Breathe in for a count of 4, hold for 4, out for 4, pause for 4.
  - Lion breath: Do a strong, long exhale with mouth wide open and tongue out.

To help practice these skills as a family, check out the many activities, videos, games, and other resources in the Virtual Calming Room from the Sacramento Unified School District and the Virtual Wellness Center from the San Diego County Office of Education.

5

Support Mental Health Through Physical Health

- Support healthy sleep habits (which are helpful for learning, mood, and physical and emotional health).
  - » Encourage a consistent bedtime throughout the week, with 8–10 hours of sleep.
  - » Limit screen time in the hour before bed (blue light from screens activates the brain, making it more difficult to fall asleep and get quality sleep).
  - » Keep personal electronic devices (e.g., phone, laptop, tablet) outside the bedroom overnight.

It is natural for teens not to get tired and fall asleep until later, and they have a harder time waking up early in the morning!

- Encourage exercise: Sports, walking, and other movement activities improve mental health, quality of sleep, and the ability to focus.
- Help with healthy eating habits: Emphasize whole foods (e.g., proteins, including nuts, chicken, dairy products; fruits; vegetables) and encourage less sugar, chips, and caffeine.
- Discourage use of harmful substances, such as alcohol and tobacco, including e-cigarettes.

Encourage exploration of interests and participation in healthy, affirming after-school activities.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT FOR TEENAGERS?

Adolescence (pre-teen and teen years) is a time of great physical, intellectual, emotional, and social maturation.

You can expect your child to:[17]

- Have stronger opinions (early teens may still have black-and-white thinking)
- Exhibit improved people and planning skills (related to social and emotional development):
- More empathy
- Better organization
- Have new and changing interests
- Assign a high level of importance to peers' opinions (it's common for adolescents to care more about what friends think than what family members think)
- Have an increased desire and need for privacy
- Begin to see their future, including seeing themselves as adults with a career
- Develop romantic/sexual interests
- Explore personal values and identities

> "Before students, we are people; young people who are going through multiple changes at once as we try to figure out who we are. Teens and the communities who support them need to be made aware about the importance of youth mental health to help aid them through this process."
>
> *—California high school student*



Although navigating these changes can be difficult for parents, they are typical and important for your child's development. If your child's or your family's functioning is being significantly impacted, then you may want to seek help. Here are some resources for understanding typical developmental changes:

- Physical and Psychosocial Development Resources for Parents of Adolescents (Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine)
- Stages and Changes of Adolescence (American Academy of Pediatrics) (also in Spanish)
- What Parents Need to Know: Growth and Development, Ages 13–17 (Advocates for Youth) (handouts in five languages)

As a parent/caregiver, you can nurture your adolescent child's growth and mental health by:

- **Learning what to expect in this stage of development**
- **Connecting with your child whenever they are ready**
- **Listening without judgment**
- **Supporting your child's new interests and newly developing skills**
- **Allowing more independence and privacy while still providing structure and boundaries**
- **Staying involved in their academics, but in a support role**
- **Leading with trust and empowering them to make more decisions for themselves**
- **Encouraging independent social connections, including in real life (i.e., offline)**
- **Being open to changes in your child, such as their trying on new identities (fashion, friends, music, gender expression)**

Bullying

For additional information about bullying and what you can do, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Stop Bullying website at stopbullying.gov.

What is bullying?

- **Unwanted aggressive behavior** by another youth or group of youths
- Bullying can be physical (e.g., hitting, damaging property), verbal (e.g., name calling), and social (e.g., excluding, spreading rumors)
- Actual or perceived **power imbalance**
- Repeated confrontational **actions**
- *Cyberbullying* is a term used when the bullying occurs through technology or online.[18]

Impacts of bullying

Bullying should be taken very seriously. It impacts those being bullied, those witnessing the bullying, and those doing the bullying. Bullying has been linked to many negative outcomes, including having a serious negative impact on a young person's mental health.

How to help prevent or stop bullying

Unfortunately, many children face bullying. But there are many things that parents, school communities, and young people themselves can do to prevent bullying and create safe spaces.

Home–school communication

Ongoing communication between schools and families about bullying is important for preventing and addressing bullying. If you have concerns, contact your school.

Communicate with your children

Having ongoing conversations about bullying can help your child identify when bullying is occurring and feel empowered to seek help for themselves and other students. Support your child by talking about:

- What bullying is
- What their experiences with bullying have been
- How to be welcoming and inclusive, especially of other kids who may be targets of bullying
- How to intervene when bullying is occurring, such as speaking up for the victim or getting help (sometimes called being an "upstander" instead of a "bystander")"

👁 **Look for warning signs of bullying**. Often children and youth do not ask for help.

Table 3. Warning Signs That Your Child May Be Involved in Bullying

Type of warning sign	Characteristics
Signs a child is bullying others	• Gets into physical or verbal fights • Has friends who bully others • Is increasingly aggressive • Gets sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently • Has unexplained extra money or new belongings • Blames others for their problems • Doesn't accept responsibility for their actions • Is competitive and worries about their reputation or popularity

Type of warning sign	Characteristics
Signs a child is being bullied	• Unexplainable injuries • Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry • Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness • Changes in eating habits (kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch) • Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares • Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school • Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations • Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem • Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

From stopbullying.gov

What caregivers can do to help

When a child **witnesses** bullying:

- Reassure them that telling an adult is a positive first step and is not tattling
- Share that they can make a positive impact on others
- Work together to make a plan that they are comfortable with for responding to bullying incidents in the future
- Reinforce that they should never participate in or support bullying
- Encourage them to be supportive and kind to the student being bullied

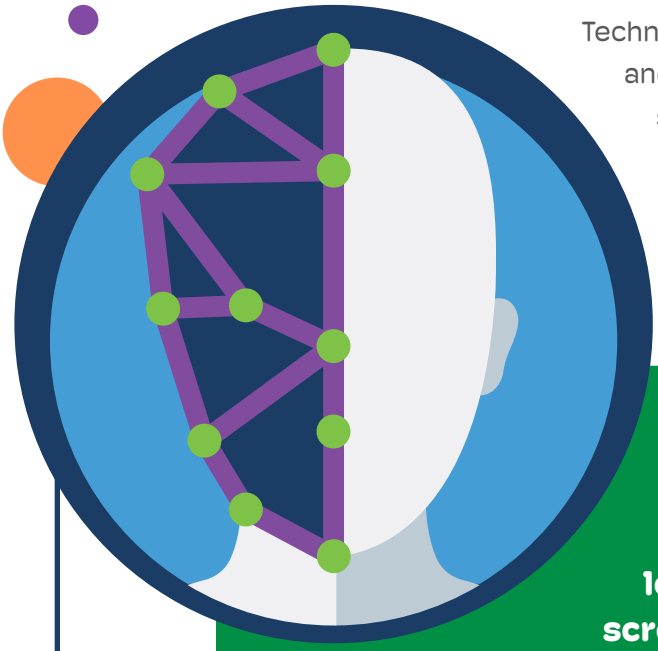
When a child is **being bullied**:

- Be supportive and listen to them without judgment
- Let them know that you are there for them and want to help
- Discuss their ideas on how they want to handle the situation
- Identify others who may be able to help, such as a teacher or counselor
- Make a plan for next steps to feel safe and get help to stop the bullying

- When a child is **doing** the bullying:
- Know that bullying is a behavior, and behavior can be changed
- Recognize that children bully for many different reasons
- Have a calm conversation to explore the reasons for their behavior
- Help them understand how their behavior affects others
- Make your expectations of appropriate behavior clear and consistent
- Let them know bullying is not OK under any circumstances
- Provide appropriate and meaningful consequences that fit the situation
- Help them think through how they can handle situations more positively
- Give positive feedback for good choices
- Reach out to a counselor for support

Adapted from Bullying Prevention 101: A quick guide for adults, from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, Inc., www.pacer.org/bullying

Safe Use of Technology and Social Media



Technology plays a big role in all of our lives—at home, school, and work. Children and teens engage in digital learning at school, play video games with social components, create and watch videos on their phones for entertainment, and connect with friends and others through social media. Although there are many benefits to technology, we also need to create boundaries and give children the skills to be online safely and manage screen time.

On average, in 2022, teens were online almost nine hours a day, not including time for homework. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends less than two hours of entertainment screen time per day for children. [19] **For more information on media usage and effects, see Media, Technology, and Adolescent Mental Health by the California Partners Project and The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens (2021).**

Have an open-door policy

so your child knows they can come to you for support when an interaction online feels unsafe, confusing, or disappointing. Consider saying, "Even if you've done something you're embarrassed about, please come to me to figure out next steps. You won't be in trouble. We can learn together and stop things from going further. The most important thing to me is your safety."

Educate yourself and your children!

Before allowing your children to use social media, it's important to learn about the platforms they are using. Read up on the different features and settings so you can understand the potential risks and benefits. Share your knowledge with your children and encourage them to ask questions. Then:

- **Ensure that your children are using age-appropriate platforms**.
- **Set restrictions on their usage**. For example, you could limit their usage to a certain number of hours per day or restrict certain features, such as direct messaging.
- **Set privacy settings**: Ensure that younger children's social media accounts are set to private so that only their approved friends and followers can see their posts.

Talk about social media often as a family and with your child.

Talk about positive uses of social media and potential negative effects

Regularly ask your child about their experiences with the technology they use.

Acknowledge that young people connect, communicate, and make plans through social media.

Discuss which apps are most commonly used by their peers so you can approve their use if they are young or simply know where they are spending their time if they are older.

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Develop limits in collaboration with your child.

What is a reasonable amount of time to be online? Should homework be completed before screen time? Can they limit their own screen time? Does a timer need to automatically shut down some phone functions and apps at a specified time?

Talk to your child about how they feel when using social media and encourage them to make choices that make them feel better.

Social media can help youth feel more connected with peers, but it can also lead to self-esteem problems, a feeling of being left out if they see others having fun without them, and unhelpful comparisons.

Check in regularly about online bullying.

Ask them if anyone is bothering them or if they have witnessed others being mean to their friends. Then talk through how to react, support others, or step away from the interactions.

Be transparent with your child.

Let your child know if you are monitoring their online activity—you want to model honesty. And they may be more likely to stay within limits if they know you can check up on them!

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Teach your child to identify risks.

Young people aren't as good at assessing risk as adults. Also, at puberty children begin to crave social rewards, such as visibility, attention, and positive feedback from peers.[21] Remind your child that people can take screen shots of their comments and can save their photos and, if posted publicly, these images can be online forever. Suggest they ask themselves, "Would I be OK with other people seeing this?" Or even, "What if grandma saw this?"

Encourage your children to think critically about what they see and read online.

Help them learn to identify trustworthy sources of information. Find out what their school is teaching them about this so you can reinforce relevant messages.

Help your child be respectful of others online.

Ask them to put themselves in the other person's shoes (take their perspective) when reading what they have posted or shared.

Lead by example.

Model positive behavior. Be mindful of what you post and share online. Avoid engaging in harmful or inappropriate online behavior.

Overall, the key to helping young people use social media safely is to be proactive and involved in their online activity while allowing reasonable privacy. By staying informed, setting boundaries, and fostering open communication, you can help your children develop healthy habits and stay safe online.

Pros and Cons of Internet Use by Youth

A review of studies found that youth who self-harm or are suicidal often make use of the Internet. It is most commonly used for constructive reasons, such as seeking support and learning about coping strategies, but the Internet may also exert a negative influence, including normalizing self-harm and potentially discouraging someone from seeking professional help. It has resulted in channels of communication that can be misused and that are inappropriate; both cyberbullying and general Internet use have been found to correlate with increased risk of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and depression.[20]

Turn off screens an hour before bedtime! The blue light from screens activates the brain and makes it take longer for your child to wind down and fall asleep. Screens right before bed can also lead to poor quality sleep. It's best to have your children keep their devices outside the bedroom overnight so they aren't tempted to look at or be disturbed by incoming communication.

Create your own family media plan based on your own priorities using a free online tool in English or Spanish from the American Academy of Pediatrics: healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx

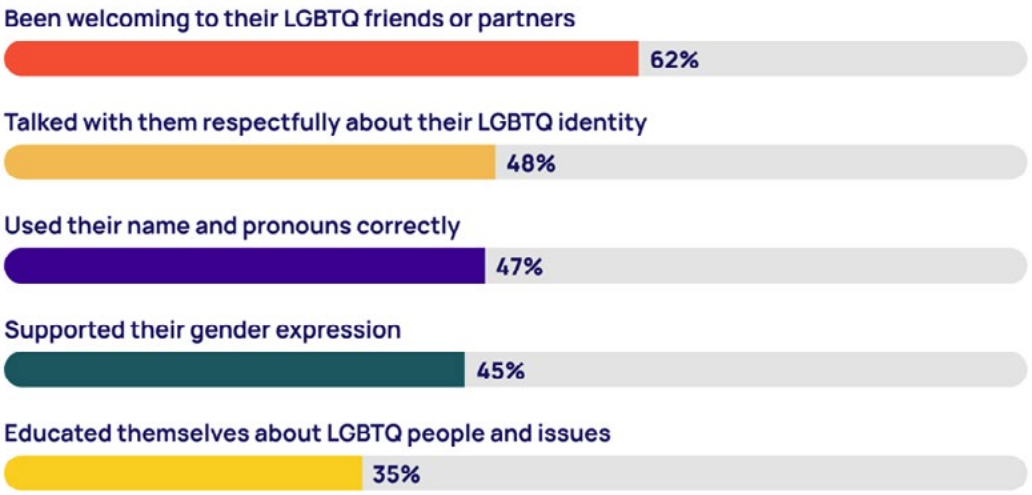
Mental Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth

Parents and caregivers can play a huge role in improving mental health outcomes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth! LGBTQ youth report lower rates of suicidal thoughts when they felt more supported by their friends and family. Simple things, such as having their gender expression and pronouns (i.e., whether they want to be referred to as she, he, or they) respected, can have a positive impact on the mental health of youth in the LGBTQ community.

Many LGBTQ youth feel supported when their parents and caregivers:

- make them feel loved with no exceptions.
  - "I'm here for you whenever you need me."
  - "I love you and I will always be your biggest supporter."
  - "I accept you just as you are."
- are open to talking.
  - Ask questions about their friends and daily life.
  - Share feelings regularly with them.
  - Join a local parent support group to explore your own feelings.
- learn about and embrace the LGBTQ community.
  - Understand that it's not just a phase.
  - Learn about LGBTQ history.
  - Advocate for LGBTQ rights or participate in local organizations that support LGBTQ youth.

Figure 2. Five most common ways that LGBTQ youth reported feeling supported by their parents or caregivers



Source: The Trevor Project 2022 national youth survey[22]

LGBTQ youth are more likely to consider suicide than their peers who are heterosexual (straight) and have a gender identity that matches their sex assigned at birth (cisgender). This is not simply because of their sexuality or gender identity—LGBTQ youth are at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized.

45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year



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Resources
for Parents (National and California)

[All online resources for parents, and include crisis lines]

SECTIONS

- Crisis Lines and Suicide Prevention Support
- Online and Social Media Safety
- Mental Health
- Information, definitions, overviews
- Tips for parents/caregivers to support family mental health
- Resources for youth
- Developmental Phases
- Social and Emotional Learning and Health
- Mindfulness Activities and Resources
- Connection to School and Learning
- LGBTQ+ Resources
- Anti-Bullying Resources
- Medi-CAL Information
    - **District Resources for Parents (ADD DISTRICT NAME)**
    -
    -
    - **Local support and resources (organizations, professionals, community groups)**

Endnotes

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