

Supporting your child's mental health at home: A guide for caretakers

As a parent or caretaker, you play a crucial role in fostering your child's mental health by creating a supportive home environment, encouraging open conversations, and promoting healthy habits. Here are some practical ways to support your child's mental well-being at home.



Foster Open and Honest Communication

Children need to feel heard and understood. Make time for daily check-ins, ask open-ended questions, and actively listen to their concerns without judgment. Let them know that their feelings are valid and that it's okay to express emotions. Modeling healthy emotional expression yourself can encourage them to do the same.



Encourage Healthy Coping Strategies

Teaching your child ways to manage stress and emotions is essential. Encourage activities such as deep breathing exercises, journaling, mindfulness, and physical activities like yoga or playing outside. Providing a variety of tools will allow them to find what works best for them.



Stay Connected and Engaged

Spending quality time together helps strengthen your relationship and provides opportunities for meaningful conversations. Whether it's through family meals, game nights, or shared hobbies, these moments of connection help build trust and emotional security.



Normalize Seeking Help

Let your child know that it's okay to ask for help when they're feeling overwhelmed. If they're struggling, reassure them that seeking support from a school counselor, therapist, or another trusted adult is a sign of strength, not weakness. If you notice persistent changes in their behavior, don't hesitate to reach out for professional guidance.



Create a Safe and Supportive Environment

A predictable and stable home environment provides children with a sense of security. Establish consistent routines, set clear expectations, and create spaces where they feel safe to relax and be themselves. A loving and reassuring atmosphere can help reduce anxiety and stress.



Health Model Self-Care and Resilience

Children learn by example. Show them the importance of self-care by managing your own stress in healthy ways, setting boundaries, and practicing self-compassion. When you take care of yourself, you're better equipped to support your child.



Prioritize Physical Health

Physical and mental health are closely connected. Ensure your child gets enough sleep, eats a balanced diet, and engages in regular physical activity. Limiting screen time and encouraging outdoor play can also contribute to better mental well-being.



Healthy Boundaries and Social Media

Limiting social media use for school-aged children has been shown to support better mental health outcomes. Excessive social media use is linked to increased anxiety, depression, and poor sleep quality among young users. By setting boundaries, children can engage more in face-to-face interactions, physical activity, and sleep. These are all factors essential for healthy emotional development. Creating social media plans to help balance online and offline activities promotes healthier habits and reduces the risks for cyberbullying and social comparison.

This article was created by members of the SMART Collaborative.

The SMART Collaborative in Erie County is a professional learning community dedicated to improving mental health for students and families. By fostering interagency collaboration, it unites schools, community agencies, and county leaders to share resources, promote best practices, and build capacity for a healthier, more supportive educational environment.