

Supporting Youth Mental Health

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The background features a series of overlapping, wavy, ribbon-like shapes in shades of pink, magenta, purple, and teal, set against a light gray gradient. The text is centered over this graphic.

What do we mean by mental health?

Distress vs. Clinical Concerns

Distress

Consistent with developmental stage

Temporary

Context or situation-specific

Does not interfere with functioning and growth

Clinical Concerns

- Out of context developmentally
- Pervasive
- Global, persistent
- Interferes with major areas of functioning



What is anxiety?

Normal reaction everyone feels when facing an ambiguous situation

Emotional and physical state that results when you don't know what's happening – related to “fight, flight or freeze” response system

“What if” thinking mode – brain trying to determine whether threat is present

Goal – recognize, understand and use skills to manage

Impairs functioning when...

Changes in
personality/behaviors

Interferes with school, family
or peers

Avoidance/overcontrol become
primary coping strategies

Depression is a
medical illness

TRUE

Before puberty, boys and girls are equally likely to suffer from depression. After age 15, girls and women are twice as likely as boys and men to suffer from depression

TRUE

Too much stress always leads to depression

FALSE

Approximately 1 out of 10
adolescents will
experience an episode of
depression before age 24

FALSE

Approximately 2/3 of adolescents with major depressive disorder also suffer from another mental disorder.

TRUE

Experiencing suicidal thoughts is a key symptom of depression

FALSE

Research indicates
that LGBTQ+ youth
are at higher risk for
suicide than their
heterosexual peers

TRUE

If you talk to someone about
suicide, you will be putting ideas
in their head

FALSE

Emotional experience

- High levels of shame
- Difficulties with emotional regulation
- Lack of healthy coping skills
- Hopelessness, helplessness
- Low self-efficacy

AVOIDANCE

Warning Signs of Suicide

- **preoccupation with death related topics**
- **talking about suicide**
- erratic behavior changes
- sudden changes in personality
- giving away special things
- taking excessive risks
- increased drug/alcohol use
- decreased interest in usual activities
- increased isolation
- excessive feelings of guilt
- **getting weapons**



How to talk to children and adolescents about suicide

- Seize the opportunity when it arises – not always easy to plan when questions will come up
- Understand what a suicidal crisis is
- With younger children – keep it simple, use illness language and acknowledge how sad the event was
- Children as young as 10 consider suicide so using words like depression becomes more important
- Pre-teens and young teens – important to use the proper language in a calm, non-judgmental way. Symptoms of depression often begin around age 13 so prevention is critical
- What have you heard? What do you know or want to understand more about? How do you feel about it?
- Have you ever thought about ending your life? Have you heard any of your friends talk about suicide?
- I know these are hard things to talk about, but I am always here for you when you want to talk



If I am worried about my child, what symptoms should I look for and what should I do?

Symptoms in Elementary school age Children

Anxiety, fear, and worry about safety of self and others

Unusually whiny, irritable, moody

Changes in behavior (e.g., increase in activity level, withdrawal from others, angry outbursts or aggression)



Changes in school performance (e.g., concentration, attention to instructions)

Difficulty sleeping

Statements and questions about death or dying

Easily startled or hypervigilance

Regression in milestones

Symptoms in Middle School Youth

Anxiety, fear, and worry about safety of self and others

Develop eating disorders or self-harming behaviors

Changes in behaviors (e.g., irritability, decreased attention, increased activity level, withdrawal)



Engaging in risky behavior (e.g. drugs and alcohol)

Absenteeism

Feeling depressed or alone

Worries about recurrence or consequences of violence

Lack of interest or connection

Symptoms in High School Youth

Anxiety, fear, and worry about safety of self and others

Discussion of events and reviewing of details – past and future

Changes in behavior (e.g., withdrawal, irritability with friends, teachers, events, angry outbursts)

Changes in academic performance



Increase in impulsivity and risk-taking behaviors

Discomfort with feelings

Irritable or/and sad mood

Decreased concentration

Increased use of alcohol and other drugs

Lack of interest or connection

Go back to
what we know

Co-Regulation

Practice skills

FAMILY PATTERNS

*It's Time to
Reflect.*

- What is our family culture as it relates to talking about feelings?
- What messages are explicitly and implicitly sent?
- What happens during times of mild stress? High stress?
- What patterns do we get stuck in when emotionally drained? Scared? Anxious?
- Is there something going on in the family or relationships among members that may be driving affect?

**WHAT DO I
KNOW
ABOUT
MYSELF?**

My coping style?

My triggers (e.g. projecting out into the future)?

What messages might I be sending out during times of distress?

What soothes me?

WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT MY CHILD?

What do you know about his or her coping?

Going back to your knowledge and experience – what worked before?

What soothes my child?

Who else does he/she respond to?

INITIATING CONVERSATIONS

Preparing and reframing
– from difficult
conversations to
*courageous
conversations*

Be present

Highlight safety and
privacy

Use behavioral
examples, not diagnoses
or interpretations

Practice reflective
listening

Practice self awareness
and centering

Do not be afraid to say
“I don’t know”

Curiosity

- What is your curiosity to problem solving ratio?
- How to be curious:
 - What would be helpful for me to do right now?
Just listen? Offer ideas?
 - What feels right to you?
 - What have you thought about doing?
 - How can I best support you?
 - Tell me more



Reassuring with a purpose



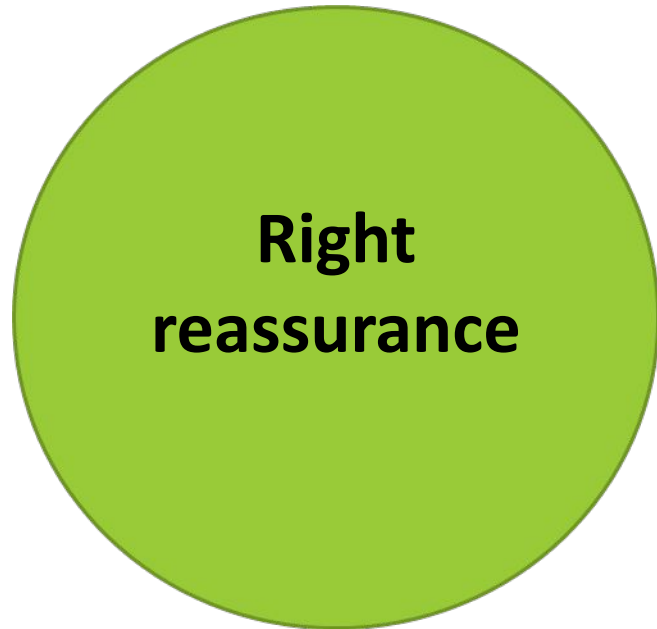
**Wrong
Reassurance**

That could never happen. I'll tell you why...

Just stop worrying! This is overreacting!

Things will be back to normal.

Reassuring with a purpose



This is a new situation for us, and we will figure out what to do one step at a time.

You can tolerate nervous feelings and have ways to respond to your worries. What would be helpful now?

AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS



WAYS TO CHALLENGE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

What is a more helpful thought?

What is another possibility?

What would the people who care about me say?

What is the worst that could really happen?

If my friend had this thought, what would I tell them?

Can I be 100% sure this is true?

If the worst really did happen, what could I do to deal with it and who could help me?

What is the best possible outcome?

Slow down to speed up

5 finger breathing

Progressive muscle
relaxation

30 second narration

Opposite action