

Ways to Wellbeing



It is Children's Mental Health Week this week which is very appropriate after 4 long weeks of remote learning in the middle of winter! We have put together some ideas that can support the whole family's well-being. Maintaining good mental health is just as important as having a healthy body. It affects the way children think, feel and act.

As a parent, you play an important role in promoting your child's mental health and recognising when there may be early signs of difficulties.

Be a positive role model

Look after your own mental health and wellbeing. Children are intuitive and will readily pick up on feelings such as stress, anxiety, hopelessness and fear, and learn from copying what they see. If you are taking care of your own mental health, it's easier for them to see what good habits look like. Just as you might encourage them to eat fruit and veg to keep their bodies healthy (and model this behaviour yourself), talk openly about, for example, staying connected with others or being physically active in order to take care of our minds.

Think about phone usage – both theirs and yours

We don't fully understand the impact of social media on our mental health but using phones and laptops can impact on our sleep, which is important to our mental health. We're also more likely to listen to one another if we're not distracted by technology.

Fresh air and exercise

Nothing has a bigger impact on how we feel than getting outside and doing some exercise. The links between our physical health and our mental health are well-documented. A simple walk, game of Frisbee or a kick about can do wonders for our mental health.

Notice any changes in your child's behaviour

Young people tell us how they're feeling in many ways, and not always verbally. Learning what is normal for your child makes it easier to notice when things change, and if this might be a sign that they're struggling.

Let your child know that you're concerned

Explain why you feel that way, for example if you've noticed they haven't been interested in activities they usually enjoy.

Use activities that you do together to have conversations about how they are doing

Talking whilst doing something together, side-by-side, such as cooking, can help them share their feelings more easily than a face-to-face conversation. Sometimes going for a drive is a good opportunity to talk.

Let them know that struggling sometimes is normal and nothing to be ashamed of

Tell them about the mental health spectrum and that we all, including you, go up and down the scale throughout our lives. Reassure them that talking about difficult feelings with the people we trust is a brave thing to do.

Listen and empathise

Often, the first step to feeling better is feeling connected and knowing that someone is alongside you, to listen to what you're saying or feeling. The way children feel may seem unrealistic or disproportionate to adults, but remember, children do not have the wisdom of experience and they may need help and direction to make sense of situations and feelings. Try to answer your child's questions and reassure them in an age-appropriate manner. Whilst you may not be able to answer all their questions, talking things through can help them feel calmer. Empathy involves acknowledging what your child is feeling, trying to understand things from their point of view and avoiding judgement.

Praise your child when they do well and foster their self-esteem.

Recognise their efforts as well as achievements - praise the small steps. For example, say your child has difficulty sitting quietly and calmly at the dinner table. Although desired, it would be unrealistic to initially expect them to do this for half an hour. So small steps might be praising that they achieved 5 minutes. At the next meal this could be built on by setting a new goal of 10 minutes.

Self-esteem is how they feel about themselves, both inside and out. Children with good self-esteem generally have a positive outlook, accept themselves and feel confident. Fostering self-esteem includes showing love and acceptance, asking questions about their interests, and helping to set realistic goals.

Help your child to develop a language of feelings.

Teaching children about feelings can be hard as it's an abstract concept, but if they can understand and express their emotions, they will be less likely to 'act out'. For example, you can discuss how characters in a book are feeling and the reasons why they may be feeling that way.

Wherever possible stick to commitments and routines.

Following through on commitments and routines builds trust and continuity. Try to keep to as many regular routines as possible to help your child feel safe and secure. This includes having regular times for going to bed, waking up, eating meals and doing activities.

Keep your promises.

Should the need to break a commitment or routine occur make sure there is a valid reason and take the time to explain why to your child. Remember, success comes from keeping your promises to your child.

If you're still worried

Talk to a trusted member of school staff or your GP who can point you towards sources of help.

We hope you find these tips helpful. It is important to recognise and accept that sometimes your child may not feel comfortable talking to you. As a parent this is a tough one, but the reality is that there will be occasions where this is the case. Rather than feel resentful or unhappy, you can take positive action and help them find someone they feel comfortable talking to, such as a grandparent, an older sibling or another positive adult role model.