



Children's mental health: what it is and how to promote it

Mental health is the way children think and feel about themselves and the world around them.

Good mental health is when children feel good about themselves and feel loved, safe and secure in their environment.

Good mental health is an important part of healthy child development. It helps children to:

- understand and manage their emotions
- build healthy relationships
- learn, play and be creative
- adapt to change
- cope with life's challenges and stresses.

Relationships and good mental health for children

A positive relationship with you directly and positively affects your child's mental health.

Here are ideas to promote your child's mental health through loving and supportive family relationships:

- **Tell your child that you love them, no matter what.** You can also show love through your body language and nonverbal communication – for example, by making eye contact, giving your child a hug or smiling at your child.
- **Make time each day to talk and listen to your child.** If your child wants to talk, try to stop what you're doing and give them your full attention.
- **Enjoy time with your child doing activities they like.** This could be reading together, kicking a ball, drawing, playing board games and so on.
- **Have regular family meals.** Eating together can strengthen your relationship with your child, give your child a sense of stability and connectedness, and have a positive effect on their development. It might also encourage your child to eat well too.
- **Work on positive ways to solve problems** and manage conflict with your partner, your child and other family members.

Emotions and good mental health for children

Children experience all sorts of emotions as part of growing up – fear, disappointment, sadness, anxiety, anger, joy, excitement and so on. When children can cope with big emotions and calm themselves down in difficult or emotional situations, they're likely to feel good about themselves.

Here are ways you can help your child learn to manage emotions:

- **Talk about emotions with your child** and encourage them to recognise and label their emotions. You can also let your child know that it's natural to have all sorts of feelings. For example, 'It looks like you're frustrated that your toy won't work. I can understand that'.
- **Role-model a positive outlook for your child** – for example, 'Running all the way around the oval looks hard, but I think I can do it if', or 'I'm disappointed that my cake didn't cook properly, but that's OK – I'll try again another time'.
- **Support your child when something is bothering them.** For example, if your child is having trouble with friends at school, you could give your child plenty of love at home, problem-solve with your child and discuss the issue with the teacher.
- **Help your child learn to manage small worries** so they don't become big problems. You can do this by gently encouraging your child to do things they're anxious about. For example, 'Have you thought about trying out for the school choir? You enjoy singing'.

Behaviour and good mental health for children

Positive behaviour helps children get along with others, build relationships, learn and develop well. This means that learning to behave well is good for children's mental health.

Here are ways to promote your child's mental health and wellbeing through a focus on behaviour:

- **Encourage your child to behave in positive ways.** This might include speaking kindly, cooperating, sorting out problems and following instructions.
- **Have family rules about behaviour and involve your child in developing rules and consequences.** Adjust the rules and consequences as your child grows. Rules and boundaries help children of all ages feel safe and secure.
- **Help your child to set realistic goals** for their age and abilities and work towards achieving them – for example, riding a bike without training wheels or trying to solve a difficult maths problem for school. And praise your child's efforts to achieve the goal, rather than the goal itself.
- **Help your child learn how to solve problems** so that they develop the skills to do this for themselves when they're older. For example, you can help your child work out what the problem is, brainstorm possible solutions, and choose a solution to put into action.
- **Encourage your child to try new things,** take age-appropriate risks, and learn from mistakes. This could be things like entering a competition, speaking in front of the class, climbing new equipment at the playground and so on.

Good physical health and mental health for children

Good physical health is important for mental health. That's because being fit and well gives your child energy and helps them feel confident, manage stress and sleep well.

Here are ways to help your child stay physically fit and well:

- **Offer healthy food** and encourage healthy eating habits in your family.
- **Encourage your child to try plenty of different physical activities and sports.** Trying different activities is good for fitness and energy levels. It can also help children feel good about themselves as they develop new skills.
- **Make sure your child gets the sleep they need.** Quality sleep will help your child to manage stress and a busy life.
- **Make sure your child balances digital technology use with other activities.** Strategies for managing digital technology use can help with this.