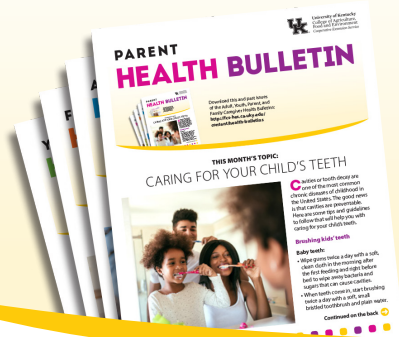


PARENT

HEALTH BULLETIN



MAY 2023

Download this and past issues of the Adult, Youth, Parent, and Family Caregiver Health Bulletins: <http://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/health-bulletins>

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH



Talking with your child about emotional topics, such as their mental health, can feel uncomfortable. This can be because of the stigma involved, lack of information, or even fears of possible blame. Too frequently, people blame mental health challenges on the person experiencing them. They say the person is not trying hard enough or they are doing something wrong. As a result, we can feel like it is our fault, or even our child's fault, if they are facing a mental health challenge.

However, openly talking to your children is a great way to help decrease this stigma.

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If you or your child has concerns about mental health, meet with your child and their pediatrician or other health-care provider.

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It can be tough to know how to start the conversation. Here are some helpful ways to talk with your children about their mental health:

Ask about feelings and validate them

Children may feel uncertain or scared to talk about their worries, obsessions, impulsive behaviors, or problems. Talk with them about what they are experiencing. Ask questions about how certain triggers or events make them feel. Ask what they can do when they feel that way. Listen with curiosity and empathize with them.

It may be helpful to tell your child about other people who experience similar problems, and how they cope. Be mindful to use language and examples that are appropriate for the child's age. Be as honest and open as you can.



If your child asks a question you do not know the answer to, it is OK to say you do not know and then work together to find an answer.

Use concrete explanations

Children can understand mental health issues better if they have real life examples or can relate to an experience. You might explain depression by relating to a time in a child's life when they felt sad. But you should explain that a person with depression often does not feel better as quickly and may need help to feel more like themselves again.

Let children ask questions

Children are curious, and may have questions about mental health challenges, words that they do not understand, or why people experience the world differently. Be open and willing to answer their questions. Help your child understand that just like physical illnesses and injuries, recovery from a mental health challenge is possible. If your child asks a question you do not know the answer to, it is OK to say you do not know and then work together to find an answer.

Reach out for help

If you or your child has concerns about their mental health, meet with your child and their pediatrician or other health-care provider together to discuss the problem and their questions. Doctors and therapists are trained to provide support and resources to children and families in this area and are there to help!

Additionally, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has resources for parents on the topic of discussing mental health and feelings with children. These include a downloadable "Meet Little Monster" coloring and activity book, which you can find at [nami.org](https://www.nami.org).

REFERENCE:

<https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Kids-Teens-and-Young-Adults/Kids/How-to-Talk-to-Your-Child-About-Their-Mental-Health>

ADULT
HEALTH BULLETIN

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