
Mental Well-being - A Guide for Parents



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INTRODUCTION

We all know when our child is ill. If they have a cold, they will have a temperature or, if they have a virus, they may have a rash. We know what to do if there are physical signs of illness and we either take them to the doctors or seek advice from the chemist.

However, what is our reaction if our child has mental health problems? This can be more problematic as we don't see any physical changes and we might think that behaviour such as mood swings are a part of growing up.

It is important for you as parents to ensure that you support the mental well-being of your child, as you would for any physical condition.

MENTAL HEALTH STATISTICS

Mental health problems are more common than you might think. Below are some statistics about mental health and young people:

- 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year.
- 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14 and 75% by age 24.
- 10% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) have a clinically diagnosable mental problem, yet 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

It is important that we try to spot mental health issues early, as they can be treated. If a young person is not identified as having issues, this can lead to problems later in life. Many statistics show that homeless people or those in prison have an identifiable mental health condition.

IDENTIFYING MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

It's not always easy to spot the signs of your child having mental health problems. However, some key indicators are:

- Feeling sad or down about their life.
- Lack of concentration or ability to apply themselves to something.
- Extreme worries or fears.
- Dramatic changes in their mood from positive to negative feelings.
- Reluctance to engage with friends or take part in activities.
- Acute lack of energy, tiredness or problems with sleeping patterns.
- Easily agitated which can lead to anger management issues.
- Feeling of stress, which they find difficult to cope with.

There may be other more significant signs that you may see such as evidence of self-harm, increased dependency on alcohol, smoking or other controlled drugs and more secretive use of the Internet to look at pro-suicide/self-harm sites.

A recent impact on some young people's mental well-being has been the dependency on social media sites. Often young people feel that they always have to display a positive image, counter to how they are really feeling. In addition, the real-time way in which young people have to react to online communication, which is called 'Fear Of Missing Out' (FOMO), adds additional pressure.

OTHER FACTORS LEADING TO MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Significant events may also lead a child or young person to develop mental health issues. These may include:

- Pressure from examinations
- Starting a new school or changing schools
- Family problems such as parents splitting up, moving house or the death of a close relative or friend.
- Witnessing domestic violence, accidents, illness or being involved in other traumatic events.

Other ways in which mental health problems can occur are if a young person is being bullied (including online bullying) or discriminated against because of race, religion or sexuality. Conversely, young people can be targeted because of their mental health problems.

PROMOTING MENTAL WELL-BEING

Our school promotes mental well-being and we have a designated co-ordinator in school. We provide lessons and opportunities for children to talk about how they are feeling and we promote healthy lifestyles with our work on eating, exercise and online safety.

As a parent, you can also support the work of school by doing the following with your child:

- Talking and listening to your child. Having an open line of communication to listen to their worries and concerns.
- Explain that mental well-being is something that matters to everyone and they should not feel stigmatised if they need support.
- Promote healthy well-being by encouraging your child to take part in activities. In addition, fitness (including walking) and healthy eating can help them feel better.
- Everyone gets stressed! Before big events such as exams, people feel nervous. Help them with coping strategies such as getting to bed early and with organisation skills so they can plan ahead.
- Digital detoxes can be a way for your child to gain balance in their life and ensure that they don't spend too much time on social media.
- Technology can also be used to help them with relaxation techniques. There are many apps available for tablets and smartphones which can help by using mood music and other techniques.

Finally, remember that you don't have all the answers and that there are some really useful websites available to support you:

Young Minds: <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Mental Health Foundation: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

Heads Together: <https://www.headstogether.org.uk/>

