

How Do I Talk to My Kids about Mental Health?

Article produced in consultation with counselors from Family Services

5 Ways to Start a Conversation

- Uncomfortable feelings are part of life. It's OK to feel angry, sad, or worried sometimes. These feelings don't always mean you did something wrong.
- You know how doctors help if you break a leg? There are also people who can help with upset thoughts and feelings. We should ask for help when we need it.
- Mistakes are part of how we learn and grow here on earth. No one is perfect! Heavenly Father loves us, even when we make mistakes. He wants us to keep trying.
- Some activities—like deep breathing, talking to someone, playing sports, or drawing—can help you feel better when you're upset. We shouldn't do things that hurt ourselves, other people, or animals.
- Sometimes people have upset feelings or troubling thoughts that don't go away. Some people have other problems with the way their mind works. That's not their fault. We should be kind and helpful to everyone and treat them as Jesus Christ would.

Talking Tips

- It's important to ask your children questions about their thoughts and feelings, and then really listen. Questions could include: What's been on your mind lately? What changes are going on in your life? Have you noticed any new feelings lately? Do you have any questions you've been wanting to ask someone?
- Your children's questions are important. They can help you know what your children are ready to learn about. Instead of dumping everything you know about a topic on a child at once, answer the question with basic information. Then invite them to respond. If they don't have any follow-up questions, maybe the basics were enough for now. If they have more questions, they might be ready for additional details.
- Avoid arguing with your child about the feelings they share, even if those feelings don't match your perception of the situation.
- Sometimes writing is easier than speaking. If conversations aren't going well, try inviting your child to write or draw about how they feel.

Activity Ideas



- For young children, draw faces to represent different feelings and help your children name the feelings.



- Brainstorm with your children a list of activities to try when they're upset.



- Think of someone sad or struggling in some way. What could your family do to show them love?



- Read and talk about articles in this month's *Friend* about mental health (listed under "Additional Resources").

I Need Help!

If you feel like your child's emotions and behavior are out of control, or their mental health is at risk, reach out to a mental health professional. (There's an article below with tips about that process.) Your bishop could help you connect with Family Services or other counseling resources in your area. Also, mentalhealth.ChurchofJesusChrist.org has a list of free crisis lines and other resources. You are loved, and you are not alone! ■

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- "Anxious but All Right," *Friend*, Feb. 2020, 20.
- "Six Ways to Feel Better," *Friend*, Feb. 2020, 22.
- "What's on Your Mind? Sometimes I'm afraid to try new things. What if I fail?" *Friend*, Feb. 2020, 38.
- For other child-friendly stories, activities, and media, visit lessonhelps.ChurchofJesusChrist.org and click on topics like "Feelings."
- "Finding a Mental Health Professional Who's Right for You" (digital-only article), *Ensign*, Jan. 2019.
- Mentalhealth.ChurchofJesusChrist.org