

CHILD & ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

Child & Adolescent Mental Health

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is a state of emotional and social well-being in which a person can fulfil his or her abilities and responsibilities and can cope with the normal stresses of life.

Good Mental Health

For most of us, most of the time, we are in good mental health. However like everyone, there are also times when we feel down, stressed or unable to cope. Fortunately, in most cases these lousy feelings pass within a few days.

You can increase your child's good mental health by showing that you care about them. This can be done in many ways, for example, by:

- Spending time with them (e.g. talking to them on the way to and from school)
- Asking them about things they are interested in
- Showing affection
- Encouraging them to talk about their feelings and work out any problems with you or someone they trust
- Listening to your child, without being distracted
- Comforting them when they are distressed or anxious
- Taking part in activities with your children, individually and as a family
- Noticing and praising small achievements
- Providing consistent care with clear limits, avoiding harsh discipline

Mental Health Problems

On some occasions for some people, the feeling of being down or unable to cope with life or parts of life may continue for longer periods of time and become a mental health problem. In fact, 1 in 5 children and adolescents will experience a mental health problem, so it is quite a common occurrence.

The following are some signs of mental health problems in children and adolescents. If they last a few weeks, you should seek professional help:

- Inability to get along with other children
- Significant fall in school work
- Significant weight gain or loss
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Lack of energy or motivation
- Moodiness
- Restlessness, fidgeting or trouble concentrating
- Excessive disobedience or aggression
- Crying a lot
- Feeling hopeless or worthless
- Reluctance to go to school or other normal activities

If you are concerned about your child's mental health, you should speak to a professional. Getting help early usually achieves the best results.

For example, you could speak to:

- Your doctor
- Someone from your child's school – such as the school counsellor, student welfare co-ordinator, or assistant principal
- A counsellor from the local community health service

You can also obtain a list of community agencies from your child's school or the local council.

Parent Mental Health

Parents also need to take care of their mental health! It is important that you take care of yourself, so that you can take care of your children. What do you do to ensure you can cope with all of life's challenges? Here are some tips:

- Take time out for yourself occasionally
- Do something you enjoy, find a hobby
- Organise time to spend with your partner
- Spend time with friends
- Talk about any concerns you have with people you trust
- Get a good night's sleep
- Do something small for yourself everyday:
- Go for a short walk
- Meditate
- Take 10 minutes of "chill out" time
- Listen to your favourite music
- Go to bed early
- Get involved in a parent group
- Reflect on the good things in your life
- Have some fun!