

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Make it a Priority



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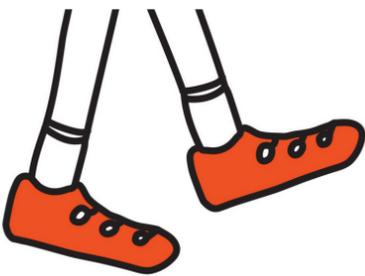
MODEL OPENNESS

Share your feelings, challenges, successes and failures with your child in a way that is age appropriate. By doing so, you'll demonstrate to them that it's safe to talk about their own feelings and challenges.

2

MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE

Quality time with your child is important. However, when you are ready to talk may be different than when your child is ready to talk to you. Plan activities together that you know they enjoy. Go to a movie, throw a frisbee or shop. While you're together, look for opportunities to talk about their friends, how school is going, or what they're following on social media.



3

LET THEM FAIL

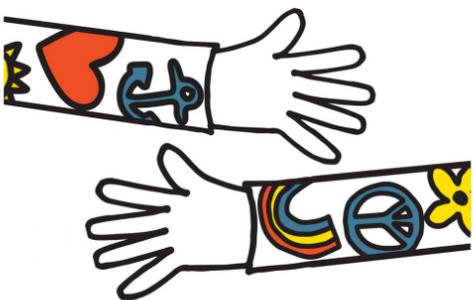
In non-dangerous situations, it's healthy to allow your child to struggle and fail. If you take away their opportunity to learn from their mistakes, they miss out on the chance to gain confidence and resiliency.



4

CREATE A SAFE SPACE

If you suspect your child is struggling, find ways to express your concern without seeming threatening or judgmental. Create a sense of safety by remaining calm and reassuring. Listen with understanding and validate their feelings. Be the kind of parent your child wants to talk to.



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SOMETIMES BEING DIRECT IS BEST

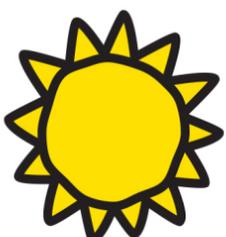
If you notice warning signs (such as shifts in behavior or personality, changes in sleeping or eating habits or loss of interest in activities) it's sometimes best to initiate a direct conversation. Ask direct questions in a supportive, thoughtful manner. This conversation is easier if you've established a baseline of trust.



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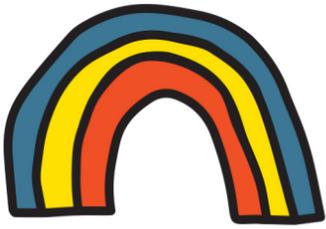
INCLUDE YOUR CHILD IN THE SOLUTION

If you're concerned that your child is struggling, ask how you can help before taking an action. For example, if your child is struggling at school, ask if it would be helpful for you to reach out to their teacher or school counselor. The more you can include your child in the process the better.



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7

GET HELP FROM A LICENSED PROFESSIONAL

If your child is not comfortable talking to you, they might be willing to talk to another adult. Providing opportunities for them to open up is the goal. And often that's easier with someone who's not their parent! It also teaches them that it is okay to reach out and ask for help.

8

DON'T ASSUME

It's important not to make assumptions about what may be driving a child's fear and anxiety. If they seem anxious, encourage them to talk more specifically about their fears. By listening carefully to their beliefs and ideas, you may find healthy ways to help them take action to overcome their anxieties.



9

APOLOGIZE WHEN YOU'RE WRONG

Parents are going to mess up. Getting it right more than not is the goal. When you do overreact or make a mistake, admit you were wrong and apologize. Not only will your children appreciate your truthfulness, it gives them permission to make mistakes too.



10

STOP THE STIGMA

Children pick up on their parents' attitudes. You may be perpetuating the stigma of mental illness without knowing it. Try to talk about emotional issues in a non-judgmental manner - the way you might talk about a physical illness.



Carter County Office: 1-606-474-5151
Pathways Helpline: 1-606-324-1141 or
1-800-562-8909

For more information contact
Kaylee Archey, Pathways Carter
County School-Based Therapist