

HOW CAN I NURTURE MY CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH?

Just as each child is different, so is each parent! Incorporating the following practices into your parenting style will give your child the best chance to develop and maintain good emotional and mental health:

- * Do your best to provide a safe home and community for your child, as well as nutritious meals, regular health check-ups, immunizations and exercise.
- * Be aware of the stages of child development.
- * Encourage your child to express his or her feelings; respect those feelings.
- * Promote mutual respect and trust.
- * Listen to your child.
- * Examine your own problem-solving and coping skills and ensure you are setting a good example.
- * Encourage your child's talents and accept limitations.
- * Spend time regularly with your child.
- * Discipline constructively, fairly and consistently.
- * Love unconditionally.
- * Foster your child's independence and self-worth.

- * Show confidence in your child's ability to handle problems and tackle new experiences.
- * Seek help when you need it.

Mental health problems in children have many different causes. These include:

- * Biological or physical factors, such as a chemical imbalance;
- * Environmental factors, such as extreme stress, violence or abuse; and
- * Traumatic experiences, such as the death of a parent or loved one.

Mental health is how we think, feel and act in facing life's situations. It's how we look at ourselves, our lives and how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices.



You Are Not Alone

If you are looking for support or answers to your questions, please contact us! You may also visit our Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign website at www.childrensmentalhealthmatters.org.



410-730-8267
www.mdcoalition.org

Maryland Coalition of Families is dedicated to building a family-driven network of information and support while improving services in all systems of care for children, youth and their families.

Maryland Coalition of Families can provide information, referral and linkage to other resources, and one-to-one support and advocacy to assist your family in accessing appropriate services for your child with mental health needs.



410-235-1178
www.mhamd.org

MHAMD is a statewide education and advocacy organization concerned with all aspects of mental health and illness. MHAMD has reached more than 36 million Marylanders through our children's mental health media outreach campaign and Kids on the Block school programs over the past 12 years. Our comprehensive advocacy agenda seeks to ensure that children with mental health problems have access to needed care and the same opportunities as their peers to reach their full potential as adults.

Healthy in Body...and Mind is a publication of the Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign aimed at raising awareness of children's mental health needs and enhancing outreach efforts to families and communities.

The Campaign is cosponsored by the Maryland Coalition of Families and MHAMD, and carried out through generous support and resources provided by the following:



Healthy in Body... and Mind

Tips to keep your child mentally healthy



What You Need to Know



Your Child's Mental Health

Like your child's physical health, mental health is an important part of growing up and developing. Mental Health is how we think, feel and act. It affects how a child:

- * Feels about himself/herself.
- * Relates to other children and adults.
- * Handles change, stress and other life situations.

It's easier to know your child needs help when you're dealing with a fever or a broken bone, but mental health problems can be harder to identify. If you think there's more going on than the natural phases of growth and development, ask yourself these questions:

- * Is my child's behavior normal for his or her age?
- * Is the behavior severe enough to get in the way of daily activities?
- * Does the problem occur frequently?
- * Does the behavior last for long periods of time?

Mental health issues include depression and anxiety, conduct, adjustment, eating and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders, as well as relationship difficulties and grief.

IS MY CHILD IN TROUBLE?

It seems sometimes like the "Terrible Twos" never end for some children. Other children seem to understand appropriate behavior, but just can't exhibit it. The tricky part of parenting is knowing the kinds of behaviors and moods that are usual for the stage of development your child is in—and when your child has gone beyond the norm and needs help.

You should consult with a health professional if you see these kinds of problems with your child:

- * Feelings of sadness and hopelessness without good reason, and the feelings don't go away.
- * Extreme fearfulness—unexplained fears or more fears than most children.
- * Anger that persists or occurs most of the time; overreactions.
- * Anxiety or expression of more or greater worries than most other young people.

- * Changes in school performance.
- * Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities.
- * Avoidance of friends and families.
- * Talk of suicide.
- * Hearing voices that cannot be explained.
- * Changes in sleeping and eating habits.
- * Poor concentration or difficulty sitting still or listening.
- * Need to perform the same routines repeatedly.

WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

Counseling for your child or your child and family often is a good place to start, and sometimes medication can be helpful. You can begin the process of finding what works best for your child with your pediatrician, who may be able to help you or can direct you to those who can. Others who can provide assistance include:

- * School administrators, school counselor or school nurse;
- * Religious leader;

- * Licensed mental health professional; and
- * Community mental health clinic.

The Mental Hygiene Administration's Maryland Crisis Hot Line is available 24/7 to those with immediate need. Call **1-800-422-0009**.

It's important not to become discouraged or give up trying to find the right services. Sometimes it can take a bit of time to find the right therapist or the right medication or mix of medications. Every child is different—but every child deserves a steady hand to guide them back to full mental health when they have problems.

HOW DO I PAY FOR CARE?

In Maryland, most health insurance plans cover some mental health treatment. Call your insurance provider before beginning treatment to find out which clinicians accept your insurance and what services are covered.

Depending upon your family income, your child may qualify for Medical Assistance which includes mental health treatment.

One in five children may experience a mental, emotional or behavioral health problem before age 18. These problems affect children of all demographic groups, regardless of education, income, race or culture.

