

- ↓ **LET THEM KNOW YOU ARE THERE** - Children need to know that you are there and ready to listen if they need to talk. Tell them often - don't assume they know!
- ↓ **TRY TO STAY CALM** - When your child shares difficult feelings, take a deep breath and try and respond in a calm, thoughtful and non-judgemental way.
- ↓ **LISTEN, HEAR AND CONNECT** - Ensure you have heard and understood what your child has said. Repeat back what you have heard to ensure your child feels listened to.
- ↓ **RESIST THE URGE TO TRY TO FIX** - Don't jump in to trying to make everything better. When we rush to 'fix', we often shut down communication and the child doesn't feel heard.
- ↓ **PLAN TOGETHER** - If possible, it can be useful to join together to plan the next steps. Plan through some options like speaking to their GP, school, trusted family member or independent service. You may also be able to access support to help you to help your child.
- ↓ **REGULAR CHECK INS** - Make sure you agree to have regular check-ins whether that's with you or another trusted adult. Difficult conversations often need to happen over time - if appropriate let them dictate the pace.

Parenting and family support helpline -
0808 800 2222



"1 in 10 young people have a mental health problem, requiring further help"

Developed by Dr Natalie Jewitt and Dr Caroline Rayment

jenby8



LOOKING AFTER YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH



Many parents feel confident in how to support their children to look after their physical and dental health but are unsure of how best to support their child to look after their mental health.

Below are some top tips from Dr Natalie Jewitt, Clinical Psychologist and Dr Caroline Rayment, GP:

CONNECT: Connect as a family each day, be this over a shared meal, walk or story time. Set aside some protected time each week, even if it's only 15 minutes, to sit with your child one to one, be curious about their world, whilst giving them your full attention. Be careful not to question, judge or rush to fix when your child shares things they may be finding difficult. Step into their shoes, empathise, support them to understand their feelings and help them problem solve – falling out with a friend may not seem like a big deal in your world but can feel like the end of the world for your child.

FUN AND RELAXATION: Have fun together! Think about what you both find fun and make time to engage in fun activities; laughter is great for you and your child's well-being! Relaxation is not something that comes easy to everyone, especially younger children. Support your child to have some quiet, calm time each day. Younger children may only manage one minute but can be supported to build this up over time. Our world can be very noisy and busy; taking a few minutes each day to have some quiet time can help children to learn how to relax – which is a skill we all need!

LEAD BY EXAMPLE: Set a positive example by modelling to your child how you look after your own mental health. When you experience difficult emotions, like anxiety, model to your child how you positively manage this. Research shows that boys find it more difficult to express their feelings. Refrain from responses like “don't cry” as this will send the message that they can't share how they are feeling with you. Children look to the significant adults around them to learn how to deal with difficult emotions like anger – what would you want your child to learn from your responses?

COMMUNICATION: Why not go for a walk or a drive together whilst you talk. If they are struggling to talk about something why not suggest they write it down, text it, or draw it. Children are often tuned in to what is going on around them, particularly during difficult times. If they are not provided with an age appropriate explanation, they are likely to come up with a narrative in their head that will be more distressing. Be honest, keep it simple and age/child appropriate. If you're unsure seek advice from a trusted friend, family member or speak to a professional.

ACCEPTANCE AND PRESSURE: Growing up can be a difficult time for some children with the increase in academic testing; development of social media; and the complexity and variety of family life. Be aware of how your words and actions may inadvertently add to this pressure. Help your child to develop strategies to deal with challenging times. Know that feeling accepted and connected to the important people around you are protective factors in preventing mental health difficulties in the future, this is particularly important if your child is in a minority group.

SCREEN TIME AND SOCIAL MEDIA: Introduce your child slowly to screen use and social media. Help them to understand how it works before they have unsupervised access. Think together about the helpful and unhelpful things about screen time/social media. Write down some family rules regarding screen use – lead by example with your own screen time. Ensure that any material accessed by your child is appropriate for their age/developmental stage, including video games and films. When children are exposed to material beyond their years it can impact on their wellbeing and mental health.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: Encourage your child to engage in regular exercise, work towards good sleeping habits, develop a calm, regular bedtime routine, limit screen time, and maintain a healthy balanced diet – avoiding excess sugar. It's important for children to have opportunities to do things outside their comfort zone (and yours!), take manageable risks and learn to problem solve. If you experience anxiety yourself, be aware of how anxiety can ripple out to the people around us, including our children. If you want some support with your own mental health, see your GP to discuss your options.

BOUNDARIES AND CONSISTENCY: Children feel more comfortable with some general boundaries – this makes them feel safe. When they don't feel safe, they struggle to learn, develop and relax. It is important that the adults around them have a consistent response, otherwise children get mixed messages which is confusing. When we set boundaries, it is important for children to have an understanding of why – they will then be more likely to follow the instruction. Keep explanations simple and age appropriate.