

TALKING TO KIDS

ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

STRESS IN KIDS

Kids might not be able to recognize or verbalize stress from their mental health conditions, so we suggest using the phrases listed in each category. The most important thing for kids to be healthy is to be in a healthy environment; listening and responding in a gentle manner can contribute positively to your conversations. Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments, where children can feel emotionally and physically safe, can protect children's brains and bodies from the harmful effects of stress. You can help your child be healthier by managing your own stress responses and helping your child do the same. Healthy nutrition, regular exercise, restful sleep, practicing mindfulness, building social supports, and getting mental health care can help to decrease stress hormones and prevent health problems.

SIMPLE FIRST STEPS

1. **Be open to talk:** Be calm and speak gently. If you notice they're acting differently, it's okay to start the conversation. Try asking questions to open up the conversation.
2. **Keep connected:** Kids learn and grow from their social circles. Whether it's from parents, siblings, friends, or relatives, find a way to help your kids stay social. Play dates, letters, and video messaging can help cover long distances.
3. **Build a basic routine:** Routines help build structure and self-regulation. Making a complicated routine can be tiresome, so try making an easy one with no more than three steps at a time. Building a simple routine will boost confidence and self-efficacy, resulting in success. Here are some steps you can add to make a simple routine: wake up and bedtime, regular hygiene tasks, meals, and playtime.

For a full list of resources from this series see our [Resources Guide](#) and for even more see our [Resources Page](#)

Please note that all information here has been Subject Matter Expert (SME) approved and if you have any questions feel free to reach out: hello@drawnfromvalor.org

"Hard conversations don't happen when young people fear being judged and parents don't initiate them, but the pay-off of productive conversations is huge" (BTW "Mental Health Online Diaries").



TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

RESILIENCE GUIDE

Kids are often much more resilient than we give them credit for, but we have to make sure that we are attending to their needs. Here are some general things that you can do to help kids build resilience:

1. **Listen** and show you're listening with your body language (don't multi-task here)
2. **Ask questions** to show them that you're listening and trying to understand
3. **Don't assume** to know what the child means
4. **Ask and listen again** and use active listening techniques to double-check with the child to make sure you understand
5. **Model good responses** because when adults show healthy ways of responding to conversation, kids see and learn to do the same
6. **Praise when you see something good** that they are doing (this increases chances that they'll do well again)
7. **Say when you don't know something**, but let them know you are willing to find out on your own or together

*"The acts of kindness young people most commonly say would have the biggest impact on their mental wellness are having someone who: **listens when they have a problem** (85% say it would have a big/moderate impact), **believes in them and encourages them to do their best** (83%), and **checks in on them or asks if they're doing OK** (80%)" (BTW "Kindness is Action").*

DON'T FORGET TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

"Supporting someone else can be emotionally taxing. You will be best equipped to offer support if you are also taking care of yourself. If you are in a support role, **take occasional breaks, take care of your body with exercise, adequate sleep and good nutrition**, and **take time to talk to a friend, family member** or counselor about your own feelings."

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THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

WHEN APPROACHING SOMEONE ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

You do not have to be a mental health professional to be supportive and to make a difference. Care from family or a friend is especially helpful and comforting.

- Let the person know you're there for them.
- Don't push them to talk if they're not ready, but let them know you're available.
- They may not want you to "fix" their situation, they may just need support, understanding, and someone to talk to.
- Statements like, "I'm here for you for whatever you need" or "You are not alone" are better to use than, "It's going to be okay" or "You'll get through this; you're strong," but any could be altered to work depending on the person or situation.
- Remember, this conversation isn't about you, so even if you've experienced something similar, don't go into detail unless the person feels it would help.
- Offer options to talk to take the burden of deciding off of the other person. Instead of "Is there anything I can do?" try "I'm here if you ever want to talk — now, later, even in the middle of the night, whatever would help you," just to give some options that they don't have to come up with.

*"There's no one way to grieve and there's no one way to comfort. And what helps a person one day might not help that person the next day. When someone is suffering, instead of following the Golden Rule, **follow the Platinum Rule, which is: treat others as they want to be treated**" (VA).*

LOOK TO OUR EMPOWERNAUT GUIDES TO HELP YOU THROUGH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY



GRIEF/LOSS



TRAUMA/PTSD



DEPRESSION



ANXIETY