



# HEALTHY MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Just as you prepare your children for the start of a new school year with the right school supplies and materials, it's also important to think about their emotional health. Remember that children may not only be excited about the new school year, but also apprehensive about all the changes that come with growing up. Their emotional health is tied into their mental health and as their parent, ; you are the person they look to for support and guidance.

Despite the fact that children may not actively seek out a conversation with you, it is important to engage with them on a regular basis so that you become part of the support system they look to when they are in trouble.

For example, a poll conducted by KidsHealth found that “kids said they were stressed out the most by: grades, school, and homework (36%); family (32%); and friends, peers, gossip, and teasing (21%).” However, only 22% of these kids dealt with their stress by talking to their parents. [1]

So, be prepared for the variety of issues that can “stress out” your children. Below are some pointers that can help you address the needs of children in from various age groups.

## Ages 5-9

### What to Expect

This group will:

- Have increased ability of their emotions, self-control
- By age 8 know how to mask emotions and their use of coping strategies
- Have knowledge of how their actions affect others
- Express preference for structure and routine, but they are learning how to assert their independence
- Be able to “step into another’s shoes”
- Form peer groups
- Spend less time with parents and more time with peers

### Tips for Caregivers

- Increase the child’s self-esteem with warm, positive parenting and reinforcement
- Minimize comparisons among children and help them overcome failures
- Give advice and encouragement when he/she comes across moral questions such as lying, cheating, stealing, etc.
- Help the child think about how to handle feelings of anger and similar emotions in safe ways
- Promote respect and positive relationships between the child and others
- Talk to the child about school, friends, and feelings regularly
- Expect that the child’s level of independence will change depending on the circumstances

For more information, contact Mental Health America at

## Ages 10-12



### What to Expect

A pre-teen adolescent (tween):

- Commonly has emotional swings (feeling wonderful one minute, and sad or irritable the next)
- Begins to rely more on same-age friends
- Views being accepted by peers means being liked
- Still relies on bonds with parents though it may not be demonstrated
- Has thoughts of independence are present but bonds with family are still clear
- Questions rules and values, often will say things are “unfair”
- May begin to have body image issues

### Tips for Caregivers

- Listen to the preteen and take his/her feelings seriously
- Don't minimize the issues they stress out about
- Work together for solutions when problems arise
- Schedule time for family connectedness (shared meals, weekend activities)
- Be involved in social media activities
- Reinforce your family's values
- Give room for independence and identity exploration
- Be mindful of their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth
- Talk openly about teasing, bullying, and similar problems and the appropriate actions to take when these issues arise

## Ages 13-15



### What to Expect

An adolescent:

- Struggles with sense of identity; worries about being normal or “fitting in”
- Feels awkward or strange about self & body image
- Maintains high expectations for self
- Still relies on connectedness with parents but not in an open manner (being rude to parents in front of others)
- Complains that parents interfere with independence
- Begins testing rules and limits
- Develops more friendships with opposite sex
- May start to experiment with sex and drugs
- Tries to find a group of peers where they fit in and are accepted
- Interests and clothing style are influenced by peer group
- Commonly experiences moodiness
- May return to childish behavior, especially when stressed
- Develops intellectual interests, which become more important
- Realizes that his/her parents are not perfect and identifies their faults

### Tips for Caregivers

- Provide an open line of communication
- Be a friend but don't forget you are the parent
- Set clear expectations and limits.
- Talk about difficult issues early on (bullying, sex, drugs, gangs, etc.)
- Don't wait until they initiate the conversation
- Get to know your teenager's friends
- Don't overreact to changes in clothing style or appearance
- Be sensitive to identity issues
- Communicate and model your values about issues such as honesty, integrity, and responsibility.
- Provide positive feedback
- If you suspect a problem, ask your teen what is bothering him/her and then listen
- Be honest about your experiences to help them make wise decisions

## Ages 16-18



## What to Expect

Common for this group:

- Girls are more likely to be physically mature
- Boys may not have completed physical maturity
- Exhibits an increased interest in the opposite sex
- Tests rules and limits
- Chooses role models
- Experimentation with sex and drugs (cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana)
- Interests and clothing style are influenced by peer group.
- Peers are still important but moving towards their own identity/thoughts
- Commonly experiences moodiness
- Increased stress and anxiety about future choices (work/school)

## Tips for Caregivers

- Provide an open line of communication and supportive environment
- Don't be judgmental and disregard their ideas and plans for the future
- Provide space for exploration of new interests
- Don't overwhelm them with talks of the future
- Talk regularly about difficult issues (sex, drugs, gangs, etc.)
- Continue to reinforce your family's values
- Set expectations and limits with room for independence
- Provide positive feedback
- If you suspect a problem, ask your teen what is bothering him/her and then listen

## Other Resources

Additional information and tips for a positive school year can be found from the following organizations and websites:

The American Academy of Pediatrics

Website: <http://www.healthychildren.org>

Phone: 847-434-4000

Email: [info@healthchildren.org](mailto:info@healthchildren.org)

Center for Public Education

Website: <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Parent-Involvement>

Phone: 703- 838-6722

Email: [centerforpubliced@nsba.org](mailto:centerforpubliced@nsba.org)

KidsHealth

Website: <http://kidshealth.org/>

National Association of School Psychologists

Website: <http://www.nasponline.org/families/index.aspx>

Phone: (301) 657-0270

Email: [communities@naspweb.org](mailto:communities@naspweb.org)

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

Website: <http://www.ffcmh.org/>

Phone: 240-403-1901

Email: [ffcmh@ffcmh.org](mailto:ffcmh@ffcmh.org)

National PTA: Emotional Health

Website: <http://www.pta.org/emotionalhealth>

Phone: 1-800-307-4782

Email: [info@pta.org](mailto:info@pta.org)

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Office of Adolescent Health

Website: <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/>

Phone: (240) 453-2846

Email: [oah.gov@hhs.gov](mailto:oah.gov@hhs.gov)

## References

[1] [http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/kids\\_stress.html#cat146](http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/kids_stress.html#cat146)

[2] <http://www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopmenttracker>

[3] <http://www.ahaparenting.com/ages-stages>

[4] <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/>

[5] <http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/families-with-teens/fact-sheets/whats-normal-for-teen-development.pdf>

[6] <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/>

For more information, contact Mental Health America at



1-800-969-6MHA

or visit our website at [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)