



**WORLD**

# Mental Health



***Happiness can be found even in the darkness of times  
if one only remembers to turn on the light.***

MKS HEALTH DEPARTMENT



Talk of Wellbeing might seem like it has only come into fashion within recent years but in truth the principles are centuries old. The challenges we face as a society, however, are perhaps greater now than at any other time. Long before Covid 19 landed on our shores, children and young people faced a mental health crisis like we had never seen before and the pressures on schools, colleges, specialist services and parents alike reached breaking point. Why children and young people's mental health has spiraled downward for decades has been long debated. The increase in exam pressures, the introduction of fast food and microwave meals, the pressures caused by social media, popular culture and gaming and their impact on social interactions, sleep patterns and the under-researched impact on the development of the child mind are all thought to be leading causes. One thing we can all agree on, however, is that there are no quick fixes and it will take a collaborative effort to tackle this nonviral pandemic. At Modern Knowledge Schools we have decided to create this newsletter to support parents to navigate the world of Wellbeing and Mental Health. We cannot promise it will all be a pleasant read but we sincerely hope it will inform and empower our wonderful community of parents.

## Mental Ill health: what are the warning signs?

It is normal for children and young people to be moody at times. But when are a child's mood swings a sign of something more like mental illness?

The most common mental illnesses in children and young people are:

- **Generalized anxiety:** Excessive worry.
- **Social phobias:** Severe insecurity in social settings.
- **Depression:** Persistent feelings of sadness.

For most children, changes in social habits including pulling away from school, friends and activities that your child has enjoyed participating in previously could be warning signs.



### Symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder include:

- Feeling restless, wound up, or on edge.
- Becoming fatigued easily.
- Struggling with concentration.
- Having difficulty keeping worry levels under control.
- Struggling with sleep, such as difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep, or not feeling well-rested.



### Social anxiety disorder symptoms include:

- Feeling very anxious at the thought of being around others and struggling to talk to other people.
- Worrying about being judged.
- Experiencing extreme self-consciousness and fear of humiliation, rejection, or offending people.
- Avoiding places where other people will be.
- Struggling to make and keep friends.

### Signs of depression include:

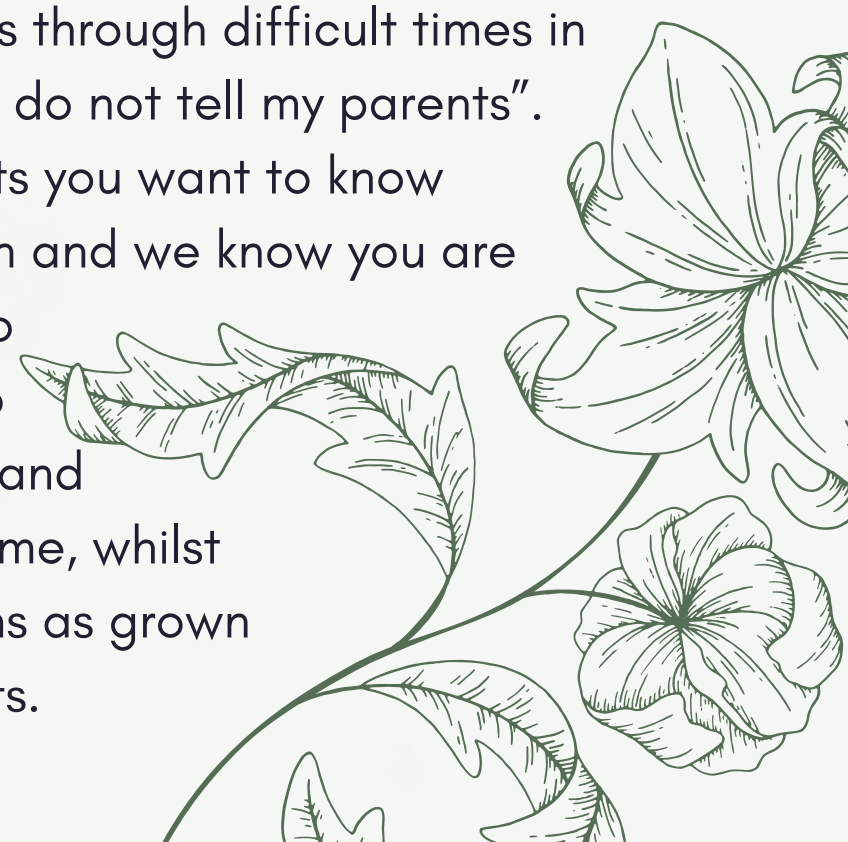
- Feeling persistently sad, anxious, or empty.
- Experiencing hopelessness or pessimism.
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless.
- Losing interest in hobbies or activities that used to be enjoyable.
- Struggling with fatigue or lack of energy.
- Feeling restless.
- Struggling with concentration, memory, and/or decision-making.
- Experiencing unexplained changes in appetite.
- Unexplained aches or pains that do not go away.



## Talking to my child

Can we be honest? We do not always want to talk to them. They can be grumpy, snappy, irrational...

Okay I will stop there before I say too much. The truth, however, is that they are going through huge growth changes and they are not all developing into the best communicators but in many ways they need us more than ever. With all the things that distract us from family time, from work and school to chores and xbox or Instagram, there is less and less time for us to unify our familial bonds. Stress too plays a huge part in how families communicate with one another. The seemingly never-ending cycle of rushing from one responsibility to another really impacts our capacity to respond to each situation as we might if we just had the time to stop, think and talk. When our counselors are supporting students through difficult times in their lives, they often hear "please do not tell my parents". Obviously, we know that as parents you want to know what is going on with your children and we know you are often the very people they need to talk to most. That said, we have to navigate these difficult situations and encourage them to open up at home, whilst respecting their rights and opinions as grown children maturing into young adults.



It can be difficult talking to your child at the best of times but especially about things that are bothering them. Sometimes it is hard to find the words to help.

### • FIND A GOOD TIME

Busy lives often take over. Setting aside protected time to talk can help them feel as though their worries are being taken seriously. For some children, this might just be 5 or 10 minutes a day. For others, they might need longer. Think about when this is. Personally I would avoid them when they are getting ready to go somewhere, are "busy" (probably on their xbox or social media) or are hungry or tired...

### • FIND A GOOD PLACE

For some, having their parent's undivided attention is marvelous, but for others it can feel a little intimidating to focus solely on their problems. You know your child best. It might help going for a walk or drive where it is just the two of you. You might find that doing a shared enjoyable activity gives them the space they need to talk (e.g. going for a coffee or doing an activity). It might even be that face to face is too difficult and that communicating with them via texts might be an initial way in...

### • ASK THE QUESTIONS

So often young people are very good at hiding the fact that they are struggling or as parents perhaps we too often assume they are "just being kids". I would urge you all from time to time to ask the question. How are you? Honestly, how are you? Or "Talk to me through what is going on". Young people particularly are not the best at starting the conversation, so they may need your help in getting the ball rolling.

### • AND THEN...JUST LISTEN

It can be really difficult to just listen and let things play out, (especially when we know the answers) but listening non-judgmentally and with compassion are amongst the most important things we can do to support our children as they muddle their way through to adulthood. It is easy to make assumptions and second guess what they might say and do. It is very important to try and hold back from jumping in with solutions and solving problems before they have told you the full story. That way, you will help them work things out for themselves.

## How to cope as a parent with a mental health problem

Many people worry about their capacity to cope with parenting if they have a mental health problem.

It is natural to be concerned about the impact this will have on you and your children. However, with the right support and resources, it is perfectly possible to be a good parent while managing a mental health problem, and to care for and support your children in a positive way.

All parents face challenges, but if you are coping with a mental health problem, you may face additional difficulties.



## Maintaining Positive Wellbeing

By maintaining a sense of positive wellbeing we can hope to avoid many common mental health disorders. Below is a short list of the top tips to maintain that zen into your everyday life!

- Try your best to establish a work-life balance.
- Take regular exercise, even if it is just a daily walk in the neighborhood.
- Try your best to maintain a healthy balanced diet. Avoiding processed foods, ready meals and reducing your consumption of red meat.
- Stay hydrated.
- Try your best to get into a good sleep pattern.
- Try mindfulness, meditation or Yoga.
- Stay connected to family and friends.
- Spend time outdoors, preferably in open spaces.
- Build in time for yourself, whether it is a hobby, a class or just "me time", do something you enjoy.
- Show and feel gratitude for what you have.

