

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

What it sounds like at different ages

IDEAS FOR FAMILIES How to connect with our kids

AGES 0 - 3

- Hold them (bounce, sway, skin contact)
- Show them your love through your eyes
- Have a warm expression and tone of voice
- Soothe them when they appear overwhelmed
- Sing, dance or read with them
- Make feeding time and sleep time enjoyable

AGES 4 - 8

- Make eye contact when talking with them
- Hold hands, hug, make time for snuggles
- Practice using words to describe emotions, i.e. “you look sad/angry/upset - I’d like to help you if I can.”
- Be curious about the world with them
- Play or do activities with them
- Be clear and consistent with boundaries/rules, offer choices but keep them limited and clear.
- Provide warnings before transitions or changes.
- When they have overwhelming feelings, show them how to calm down (breathe deeply, move your body, use your 5 senses)
- Practice story-sharing, read with them, observe their interests and participate
- Create special routines with them

*It’s never too early to start ...
and never too late to keep trying.*





AGES 9 - 12

- Express confidence in them
- Invite them to interact with you through sports/games/art
- Ask about their friendships
- Talk about body changes in positive and comfortable ways
- Ask open ended questions like “What was it like for you to play in today’s game?”, “What do you enjoy most about your art class?”, “What part of math feels most frustrating?”
- Invite critical thinking - “What do you think about how they were treated by that group of kids?”, “Do you think it’s really true that no one liked your project? What tells you that?”
- Focus on their process/efforts more than their outcomes/good behaviour.



AGES 13 - 18

- Participate with and support them in movement and expression (art, sport, hobbies)
- Get curious about their peer relationships and styles of connecting
- Encourage critical thinking and problem solving
- Acknowledge stress in their lives
- Remind them of your interest in their lives
- Show you care and make yourself available to support them instead of doing things for them (partner with them in growing capability and confidence)
- Ask open ended questions about all domains of life (social, emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual)
- Create new rituals of connection like Friday night family games, once a month movie night, special birthday traditions, a “skip school/workday” to go on a parent-teen adventure/outing, cook a meal together once a week.
- Validate their feelings

