

What Children Need for Good Mental Health

It is easy for parents to identify children's physical needs—like good food, safe housing, plenty of sleep and exercise.

But children's mental and emotional needs may not be as obvious. Good mental health allows children to develop emotionally, socially and intellectually, and learn new skills. These tips can help you support a child's mental health:

- **Communicate.** Spend time every day listening and talking to your children about what is happening in their lives. Share emotions and feelings with them.
- **Give children unconditional love.** Children need to know that your love does not depend on what they do.
- **Nurture confidence and self-esteem.** Praise and encourage your children, and set realistic goals that test their abilities. Accept mistakes and failures as a part of life.
- **Encourage children to play.** Playtime is important to children's emotional development. Play helps children be creative, develop problem-solving skills and self-control, and learn how to get along with others.
- **Give appropriate guidance and discipline.** Be firm but kind and realistic with your expectations. The goal is not to control your children but to help them learn self-control.
- **Provide a safe and secure environment.** Fear can be very real for children. When they are frightened, try to find out why. Respond by being loving, patient and reassuring, not critical.

If you are concerned about your child's mental health, consult with his or her teachers, guidance counselor or other adult who may have information about his or her behavior. If you think there is a problem, seek professional help.

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