



Mental Health America of Franklin County

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Your Child's Mental Health: What You Need To Know

It is easy for parents to identify children's physical needs---like good food, safe housing, plenty of sleep and exercise. Children's mental and emotional needs may not be as obvious, but they are just as important. Good mental health allows children to develop socially, and intellectually, build self-esteem, learn new skills and develop a positive mental outlook.

These tips can help you support your child's mental health:

- Communicate. Spend time every day listening and talking to your child about what is happening in their lives. Share emotions and feelings with your children.
- Give children unconditional love. Children need to know that your love does not depend on their accomplishments.
- Nurture children's 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 when necessary. Be firm, but kind and realistic with your expectations. The goal is not to control the child, but to help him or her learn self-control.
- Provide a safe and secure environment. Fear can be very real for a child. When they are frightened, try to find out why. Respond by being loving, patient and reassuring, not critical.

Knowing when to seek help: When your child has an emotional problem, sometimes all it takes is a hug, kiss and a smile from you to make them feel better. However, sometimes children can develop emotional problems that will not go away, no matter how much love and support you give them.

The following signs can help you determine if your child needs help from a professional. By identifying possible problems early, your child can be more easily treated.

- Decline in school performance Poor grades despite strong efforts
- Hyperactivity or fidgeting
- Persistent nightmares
- Continuous or frequent aggression or "acting out"
- Continuous or frequent rebellion and/or temper tantrums
- Depression, sadness or irritability

As parents, we believe we can fix almost anything in our children's lives but sometimes more help is needed. Nearly one in five children has a diagnosable mental health problem. If you are concerned about your child's mental health, consult with his or her teachers, guidance counselor or other adults that may have information about his or her behavior. If you think there is a problem, make an appointment with your child's doctor or school psychologist. To get a referral or for more information, contact Mental Health America of Franklin County, (614) 221-1441.

Mental Health America of Franklin County is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at www.mhafc.org.