Supporting Children’s Mental Health

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), there are several ways in which both parents and educators can help support the social and emotional development of young children. These include:

- Create a sense of belonging – feeling connected and welcomed is essential to children’s positive adjustment, self-identification, and sense of trust in others and themselves. Building strong, positive relationship among students, school staff, and parents is important to promoting mental wellness.

- Promote resilience – adversity is a natural part of life and being resilient is important to overcoming challenges and good mental health. Connectedness, competency, helping others, and successfully facing difficult situations can foster resilience.

- Develop competencies – children need to know that they can overcome challenges and accomplish goals through their actions. Achieving academic success and developing individual talents and interests helps children feel competent and more able to deal with stress positively. Social competency is also important. Having friends and staying connected to friends and loved ones can enhance mental wellness.

- Ensure a positive, safe school environment – feeling safe is critical to students’ learning and mental health. Promote positive behaviors such as respect, responsibility, and kindness. Prevent negative behaviors such as bullying and harassment. Provide easily understood rules of conduct and fair discipline practices and ensure an adult presence in common areas, such as hallways, cafeterias, locker rooms, and playgrounds. Teach children to work together to stand up to a bully, encourage them to reach out to lonely or excluded peers, celebrate acts of kindness, and reinforce the availability of adult support.

- Teach and reinforce positive behaviors and decision making – provide consistent expectations and support. Teaching children social skills, problem solving, and conflict resolution supports good mental health. Positive feedback validates and reinforces behaviors or accomplishments that are valued by others.

- Encourage helping others – children need to know that they can make a difference. Prosocial behaviors build self-esteem, foster connectedness,
reinforce personal responsibility, and present opportunities for positive recognition.

- Encourage good physical health – good physical health supports good mental health. Healthy eating habits, regular exercise and adequate sleep protect kids against the stress of touch situations. Regular exercise also decreases negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, and depression.

- Educate staff, parents and students on symptoms of and help for mental health problems – information helps break down the stigma surrounding mental health and enables adults and students recognize when to seek help. School mental health professionals can provide useful information on symptoms of problems like depression or suicide risk.

- Ensure access to school-based mental health supports – school psychologists, counselors, and social workers can provide a continuum of mental health services for student ranging from universal mental wellness promotion and behavior supports to staff and parent training, identification and assessment, early interventions, individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, and referral for community services.

- Provide a continuum of mental health services – school mental health services are part of a continuum of mental health care for children and youth. Build relationships with community mental health resources.

- Establish a crisis response team – being prepared to respond to a crisis is important to safeguarding students’ physical and mental well-being. School crisis teams should include relevant administrators, security personnel and mental health professionals who collaborate with community resources. In addition to safety, the team provides mental health prevention, intervention, and postvention services.

For more information regarding ways to support children’s mental health, please visit the National Association of School Psychologist’s website at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)

For related information regarding child development, contact Karen Kuehn Howell, Ph.D., at the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 1256 Briarcliff Road, N.E., Suite 309W, Atlanta, Georgia, 30306. You can also phone us at 404-712-9800 or visit our website at [http://www.emory.edu/MSACD](http://www.emory.edu/MSACD)
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