



Family Information

Healthy Bodies

Mental Health

The Importance of Mental Health

Just as physical health can impact the quality of life, so can mental health, and children are no exception to this theory. With school violence plaguing the media, it is now a sad fact that many children are very unhappy and acting out with violence and destruction. How serious is the issue of depression in children? It is estimated that as many as one in every thirty-three children and one in eight adolescents may suffer from depression. One in five children have a diagnosable mental, emotional or behavioral disorder and up to one in ten may suffer from a serious emotional disturbance. Thirty percent of children are currently receiving mental health treatment. Even more disturbing, suicide is the third leading cause of death for fifteen to twenty-four year-olds and the sixth leading cause of death for five to fourteen year olds. Some attribute this to the increasing amount of pressure that children experience. Others believe it stems from a society that does not protect or shelter its youngest members. Whichever the case, parents need to be aware of this epidemic in order to provide for their children's mental health as well as their physical health.



What Children Need for Good Mental Health

Most parents can easily list the basics of what children need for adequate physical health: food, sleep, exercise, etc. However, determining how best to provide for children's mental health may seem a bit more difficult. Here are what experts feel are the 'basics' for mental health:

***Unconditional love from their family.** Children need to know that the love they receive from their family is constant and not something that can be easily lost or taken away. Using phrases like, "I will love you so much if you . . ." only serve to make the child doubt the consistency and nature of the expressed feelings. ***Self-confidence and high self-esteem.** Parents should nurture children's levels of confidence and esteem by praising and encouraging them while being sure to keep standards at developmentally appropriate levels. ***The opportunity to play with other children.** Playtime is much more than just 'having fun.'

Through play, children enhance their creative abilities, learn how to solve problems, and increase self-control. By playing alongside their peers, skills such as empathy, cooperation, and patience are learned. ***Encouraging teachers and supportive caregivers.** Families carry the most important part in influencing their children when it comes to values and morals, however, teachers and caregivers play a significant role in this area as well. Be attentive to the care children receive from their teachers and caregivers. Look for signs of respect, love, and kindness and let those adults know that these characteristics are a priority in your family. To maintain a trustworthy staff, Kids 'R' Kids holds true to its founding philosophy of hugging a child first, then moving on to the teaching process. This method encourages a bond of trust between the teacher and the child that helps strengthen learning inside the classroom. ***Surroundings that are safe and secure.** Children need to be in environments where they feel safe and valued. Consistency can go a long way in providing security, especially when children travel between multiple homes. ***Appropriate guidance and discipline.** Families and teachers should use kind but firm boundaries with children. Keep in mind the appropriateness of the boundaries when putting them in place. Understanding children's abilities and development will help. By setting good examples, and allowing children to ask questions and express their feelings, mutual respect is acquired.

Warning Signs:

- * Poor school performance and/or refusal to go to school
- * Decline in grades
- * Consistent anxiety or fear
- * Regular nightmares
- * Hyperactivity or fidgeting that interferes with activities
- * Consistently aggressive or disobedient
- * Signs of depression, sadness or irritability
- * Increase in frequency or intensity of temper

Do you have concerns or questions regarding your child's mental health?

Try these websites:

www.aacap.org www.ffcmh.org
www.familysupportamerica.org www.naspweb.org