

## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEEN ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

### **Practice Active Listening**

Active listening means being fully present. Our lives are busy and there are plenty of things vying for our attention - jobs, responsibilities, technology, world events, friends and family. At yet it's vital to make time to connect with your child and offer them your full attention. That alone can be very rewarding and make an impact on the teen.

### **Resist the Urge to Rescue or Fix**

It can be extremely difficult to see your child in pain or struggling. A parent's natural instinct is to step in and take away the discomfort. This is well-intended, but it ends up preventing the child from learning how to self-soothe, manage their distress and problem solve. Those skills are needed in order to develop into effective young adults.

### **Validate Their Experience and Their Emotions**

You may not understand, relate to, or even agree with what your child is going Through and how they are experiencing the world. You don't have to in order to Provide validation. Instead, simply by giving your child a non-judgmental space to discuss their lives, they are more likely to feel connected to you, and less likely to act ineffectively when they are struggling with their emotions.

### **Ask Your Child What They Think They Need**

It's a common parenting perspective to assume you know exactly what your child needs and what strategies will work for them. And as their parent, you are the expert on your child. But teenagers today are facing a lot of intense issues that are new and complex - from safety in schools to cyberbullying through social media. It may be most effective to directly ask them what would be helpful. Sometimes they'll want someone to support them in solving problems, and other times they just may need to vent.

### **Check in With Your Intuition and Wise Mind**

Parenting children often includes a cascade of emotions - overwhelm, exhaustion, anger, joy and worry, just to name a few. And whether they are toddlers or teenagers, children are usually adept at pushing their parents' buttons and eliciting a lot of emotions. So it makes sense that when your child comes to you with a problem they're facing, it can be easy to react from a highly emotional place. Conversely, and especially if you are a parent who is sometimes made uncomfortable by your child's expressed emotions, you may find yourself denying your own emotional experience and focusing solely on the facts of a situation. When your child comes to you with a problem, it may be helpful to take a "middle path" approach by acknowledging both the emotions you and your child feel, as well as the facts of the situation. Give yourself time to process and then respond. Doing so, as opposed to quickly reacting out of pure emotion or logic, may help your teen feel supported.

### **Praise Effort No Mastery**

Behavior change can be really difficult. Think of something you've been trying to change over the years - waking up earlier, flossing, driving slower. Our habits are often hardwired into our brains, and creating new ones takes time. As your child starts to learn and practice new coping skills, pay attention to and praise their effort. Focus less on their mastery of the skill. This can increase your child's motivation to continue to make positive changes in their life.

### **Seeking Support Outside of the Family**

It's possible your child may not feel comfortable discussing the lessons they are learning at school. While it may feel frustrating and anxiety-provoking not to discuss these with your child, they are doing so at length with teachers and peers. They may need time to feel comfortable discussing them with their caregivers. If you would like to speak about the topics covered in the videos with your child in a safe environment, family therapy could be an effective tool.