

# 01.

If your child tells you that they're feeling anxious or depressed, it's tempting to ask "why" – but be aware that there isn't always a reason why someone gets sick. Sometimes they just do.

# 02.

It can be hard for your child to explain their feelings. Allow them space and time to find their words. Don't try to finish their sentences for them.

# 03.

Never blow off your child if they come to you with a problem, no matter how small you think it is. If you mishandle the small stuff, they won't come to you about the big stuff.

# 04.

Remember, your child is probably scared to tell you about their feelings. Children tend to believe that they will get in trouble or end up being a burden on their parents. Make the situation as safe and open as possible.

# 05.

If you think your child is hurting, schedule an appointment with your family doctor. With your doctor, you will be able to determine the right next steps to take.



**Need help? Worried about a loved one?**  
Reach out to someone today:



**Call** the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255



**Text** the Crisis Text Line at 741-741



**Chat online** at [www.ImAlive.org](http://www.ImAlive.org), [www.CrisisChat.org](http://www.CrisisChat.org)



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# TALKING TO YOUR CHILD About Mental Health

# *We must talk to our kids*

## ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

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### **More and more we are seeing that younger and younger children are experiencing mental health challenges.**

In fact, the median age of onset for anxiety symptoms is 11 years old – meaning that half the cases occur before that age! Additionally, a child under the age of 10 dies by suicide every 5 days in the USA. It is increasingly obvious that discussing mental health with our children is crucially important.

If you know that mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety run in your family, it is even more important to talk to your children early on, like you would for any other physical health problem.

### **ELEMENTARY AGE (5-10)**

Young children often do not have the cognitive development yet to fully understand concepts such as stress, depression, or anxiety. However, they do understand things like fear, happiness, and sadness. Elementary age is the perfect age to start prepping your children to come to you when they experience problems.

Take their problems seriously – if you don't listen to the small problems, then they won't come to you for the big ones.

#### **Suggested Script:**

“You know how sometimes you get sick in your belly and you feel like you have to throw up? Sometimes that can happen in our heads too. In fact, this is something that happens a lot in our family. We get sick with

our emotions and end up feeling bad all the time – sad or afraid or worried – for no reason. If this ever happens, don't be afraid, just make sure you talk to me so we can go to the doctor and get you the right medicine to feel better.”

### **MIDDLE SCHOOLERS (10-14)**

Middle school introduces puberty, which is prime time for mental illnesses to begin appearing. In fact, 50% of illnesses manifest by age 14, with 75% by age 24. Coupled with limited coping skills, middle schoolers often struggle without even knowing they are sick.

Middle schoolers are also more understanding of the body and anatomy and can grasp concepts such as how mental illnesses can run in family trees.

#### **Suggested Script:**

“Middle school is a rough time. I know that there are a lot of changes happening to you right now, in your physical body and also your sense of identity and friends. Sometimes when puberty strikes, it can cause a wave of chemicals through your brain that can throw things off balance and result in illnesses like depression or anxiety.

If you feel like you're unhappy most of the time, please let me know so we can get you to a doctor and get the treatment you need to bounce back and be happy again.”

### **HIGH SCHOOLERS (14 - 18)**

High school students are definitely capable of understanding the concepts of mental health and mental illnesses. They're more likely to know someone who has experienced problems and more likely to have struggled themselves.

By high school, approximately 1 in 7 students have seriously considered suicide within the past school year, with approximately 1 in 14 making a suicide attempt. You do not have to be shy about talking frankly about mental health challenges to your teenager.

In addition to mental health challenges, teens are interested in dating and career choices and can be falling into toxic amounts of stress. Discussions involving dating violence, perfectionism, and burnout are also highly recommended.

#### **Suggested Script:**

“I know that being a teenager is tough. There is a lot of pressure to figure out who you are, who you want to be with, where to go to college, and what career to pursue. I know it feels like I don't understand what its like to be a teenager. The fact is a lot of teenagers struggle with a mental illness and don't even realize it. If you ever feel like you can't be happy, or that there is no hope for you, or if you're worried a lot or having trouble eating or sleeping, these are all symptoms of an illness that can be treated and get better. If you think you need help, please come and talk to me so we can get you to a doctor right away.”