

# Supporting Your Child with a Mental Health Condition



Mental health conditions don't discriminate. They can affect anyone at any age—and when your child is the one diagnosed, it can bring up a lot of emotions. You might feel sad, confused, overwhelmed, or helpless.

Know that these feelings are perfectly normal. And it's OK to not have all the answers right away. The most important thing is to lead with patience and compassion. Here are 6 practical strategies to help you support your child day to day.

## 1. Learn about their condition

Finding out as much as you can about your child's diagnosis is the first step in supporting them. When you understand what they're going through, you can:

- Better empathize with their experiences
- Spot warning signs and symptoms
- Communicate effectively with healthcare professionals

Start with reputable resources, such as the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) and the [American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#). Both offer advice specifically designed for parents. Don't forget to lean on your child's healthcare team, too. They've helped many families navigate similar situations. Trust them to know the best strategies for your child's specific needs. And ask how you can play an active role in their care plan.

Depending on your child's mental health needs, the school may also need to be involved. Your healthcare team can help you figure out how to work with the school. They can also help you advocate for your child in the school setting.

## 2. Open the lines of communication

One of the most important gifts you can offer as a parent is good communication. Make sure they know that they can confide in you about anything. No topic is off-limits. For conversations about mental health, remember these key pointers:

- **Empathize with their experiences.** Put yourself in your child's shoes. Try to understand what they're going through so that they feel heard.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** These encourage deeper conversations beyond yes or no responses. For instance, you can ask, "How does that make you feel?" This can encourage your child to open up and talk.
- **Address fears and concerns.** Your child might be scared or confused about their diagnosis. Ask about their worries.
- **Stay away from blame.** Reinforce that what's happening is not their fault. Mental health conditions are not a choice they made
- **Be patient.** Follow your child's lead. They may not want to open up right away, and that's OK. Let them know you're there when they're ready to talk.

## 3. Offer reassurance

Explain to your child that their diagnosis doesn't define them or reduce their worth. Remind them:

- **They are loved.** A mental health condition could never change or take away your love.

- **It's OK to ask for help.** Looking for support is a sign of strength, not weakness.
- **They are not alone.** So many people learn how to manage their mental health conditions and have happy, fulfilling lives.

## 4. Find time for fun

A mental health condition doesn't change the fact that kids still need to be kids. Encourage your child to participate in activities they enjoy. It gives them a chance to just have fun. And it can be a positive outlet for their emotions. Join in when you can for a shared bonding experience.

Also help them find time to spend with peers and friends. Building and keeping relationships goes a long way in boosting their mood, creating cherished memories, and growing their support network.

## 5. Promote a healthy lifestyle

Mental and physical health are connected. Nurturing healthy habits can have a big impact on your child's overall well-being. For the whole family, focus on:

- **Eating well.** Healthy meals help your mind and body feel their best.
- **Moving more.** Exercise can reduce feelings of stress and depression.
- **Getting quality sleep.** Rest is key for maintaining emotional health.

Try to set predictable daily routines at home. Routines can provide a sense of security and control, reducing anxiety. Aim for consistency around mealtimes, homework, chores, relaxation, physical activity, and bedtime.

## 6. Take care of you

As a parent, it's vital to make your mental health a priority, too. When you're feeling your best, you can provide better support for your child. Here are some ways to maintain your own well-being:

- Spend time on self-care activities you enjoy
- Reach out to support groups, friends, and family
- Consider therapy or counseling for yourself

Remember, this journey is a marathon—not a sprint. There will be good times and challenging moments. But with knowledge, patience, and compassion, you can make sure your child feels loved, understood, and supported every day.

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