

Children's Mental Health

November 2018

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For more information on
how to lead a healthier
lifestyle, visit our website
GetHealthyCT.org





CHILDRENS MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS



Promoting children's mental health

Children's Mental Health Matters

Just as you can help prevent a child from catching a cold or breaking a bone, you can help prevent a child from having mental health problems. We know what it takes to keep a child physically healthy—nutritious food, exercise, immunizations - but the basics for good mental health aren't always as clear. The first "basic" is to know that children's mental health matters. We need to treat a child's mental health just like we do their physical health, by giving it thought and attention and, when needed, professional help.

Consequences of Mental Illness May Be Prevented

Although there can be a genetic or biological component to mental illness, and many children live in unsafe environments that put them "at-risk" of developing mental health problems, the consequences of mental illness may often be prevented through early intervention. At the very least, it is possible to delay mental illness and/or lessen symptoms. The best way to promote children's mental health is to build up their strengths, help to "protect" them from risks and give them tools to succeed in life.

Mental Health Promotion

Promoting a child's mental health means helping a child feel secure, relate well with others and foster their growth at home and at school. We do this by helping to build a child's confidence and competence - the foundation of strong self-esteem. This can be achieved by providing a child with a safe and secure home; warmth and love; respect; caring and trusting relationships with family, friends, and adults in the community; opportunities to talk about experiences and feelings; time to play, learn, and succeed; encouragement and praise; and consistent and fair expectations with clear consequences for misbehavior.

For more information, contact Mental Health America at

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Know the signs

If there is concern that a child may be experiencing a mental health problem, it is important for adults to seek help from a doctor or mental health professional. Just like with physical illness, treating mental health problems early may help to prevent a more serious illness from developing in the future. Consider consulting a professional if a child you know:

- ☒ Feels very sad, hopeless or irritable
- ☒ Feels overly anxious or worried
- ☒ Is scared and fearful; has frequent nightmares
- ☒ Is excessively angry
- ☒ Uses alcohol or drugs
- ☒ Avoids people; wants to be alone all of the time
- ☒ Hears voices or sees things that aren't there
- ☒ Can't concentrate, sit still, or focus attention
- ☒ Needs to wash, clean things, or perform certain rituals many times a day
- ☒ Talks about suicide or death
- ☒ Hurts other people or animals; or damages property
- ☒ Has major changes in eating or sleeping habits
- ☒ Loses interest in friends or things usually enjoyed
- ☒ Falls behind in school or earns lower grades

What Parents Can Do

Care for your children's mental health just as you do for their physical health.

Pay attention to warning signs, and if you're concerned there might be a problem seek professional help.

Let your children know that everyone experiences pain, fear, sadness, worry, and anger and that these emotions are a normal part of life, encourage them to talk about their concerns and to express their emotions.

Be a role model—talk about your own feelings, apologize, don't express anger with violence, and use active problem-solving skills.

Encourage your children's talents and skills, while also accepting their limitations.

Celebrate your children's accomplishments.

Give your children opportunities to learn and grow, including being involved in their school and community and with other caring adults and friends.

Think of "discipline" as a form of teaching, rather than as physical punishment; set clear expectations and be consistent and fair with consequences for misbehavior; make sure to acknowledge both positive and negative behaviors.

For more information, contact Mental Health America at

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What Teachers Can Do

Think about mental health as an important component of a child being "ready to learn;" if a child is experiencing mental health problems, he or she will likely have trouble focusing in school.

Know the warning signs of mental illness and take note of these in your students and seek consultation from the school mental health professional when you have concerns; psychological and/or educational testing may be necessary.

Use the mental health professional(s) at your school as resources for: preventive interventions with students, including social skills training; education for teachers and students on mental health, crisis counseling for teachers and students following a traumatic event, and classroom management skills training for teachers.

Allow your students to discuss troubling events at school or in the community; encourage students to verbally describe their emotions.

What Doctors Can Do

Recognize that mental health is part of a child's overall health.

Be informed about mental health issues in children and know the warning signs of mental illness.

Become familiar with mental health screening tools. Use these when a "red flag" is raised or routinely screen for illness, asking both children and parents about a child's emotions and behaviors—especially substance use, depression symptoms, school performance, and talk of suicide.

Be familiar with the most effective pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic treatment options.

Make referrals for mental health care when appropriate and follow-up with parents after a referral is made.

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Help is Available

Mental disorders in children are treatable. Early identification, diagnosis and treatment help children reach their full potential and improve the family dynamic.

Children's mental health matters! To learn more, talk to a doctor, mental health professional or visit one of the websites below.

Mental Health America	800-969-6MHA	www.mentalhealthamerica.net
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry		www.aacap.org
American Psychiatric Association		www.psych.org
American Psychological Association		www.apa.org
Center for Parent Information and Resources		www.parentcenterhub.org
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health		www.ffcmh.org
Kids Mental Health Information Portal		www.kidsmentalhealth.org



Recognizing Mental Health Problems in Children

- Children's mental health problems are real, common and treatable. Although one in five children has a diagnosable mental health problem, nearly two-thirds of them get little or no help.
- Untreated mental health problems can disrupt children's functioning at home, school and in the community. Without treatment, children with mental health issues are at increased risk of school failure, contact with the criminal justice system, dependence on social services, and even suicide.
- Parents and family members are usually the first to notice if a child has problems with emotions or behavior.

The following signs may indicate the need for professional help:

- Decline in school performance
- Constant worry or anxiety
- Repeated refusal to go to school or to take part in normal activities
- Hyperactivity or fidgeting
- Persistent nightmares
- Persistent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums
- Depression, sadness or irritability

Early identification, diagnosis and treatment

- A first step may be to have your child complete our [youth](#) screening which is intended for young people (age 11-17) who are concerned that their emotions, attention, or behaviors might be signs of a problem.
- A complementary [parent](#) screening is also available for your use.
- The information from the completed screenings can be helpful in [starting a conversation](#) with your child about their mental health, and may be useful when talking with your child's pediatrician or a mental health professional.
- An evaluation may include consultation with a child psychiatrist, psychological testing and medical tests to rule out any physical condition that could be causing the symptoms.
- Children also must be carefully evaluated to distinguish possible mental health conditions from learning disabilities or developmental delays.
- If your child is diagnosed with a mental health problem, a comprehensive treatment plan should include psychotherapy and, in some cases, may include medication. The plan should be developed with the family. Whenever possible, the child should be involved in treatment decisions.

Source: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/recognizing-mental-health-problems-children>



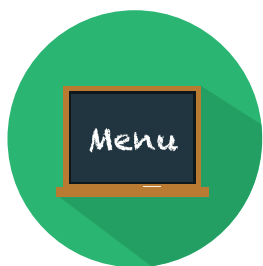
United States Department of Agriculture



MyPlate
MyWins

Making family meals

Family meals around the table provide an opportunity to spend time together.
Try these tips to help your family enjoy mealtimes together.



Plan your meals

Avoid stress at mealtime by planning a weekly menu and posting it in a location for everyone to see, like a chalkboard in the kitchen.



Prep ahead

Have ingredients for the week ready. After you shop, cut vegetables and measure ingredients in advance for easier meals.



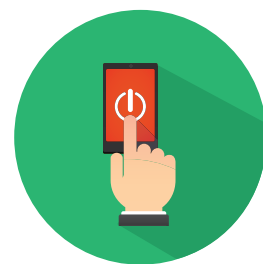
Make mealtime a priority

Make time for family meals when planning your household's schedule each week. Try to cook, eat up, and clean up together!



Think beyond dinner

If evenings are too hectic at your house, consider other meals for family time such as a weekend brunch or even afternoon snack time.



Keep meals fun and focused

Keep the family table a media- and stress-free zone. Use your valuable family time to “unplug,” interact, and focus on each other.



List more tips



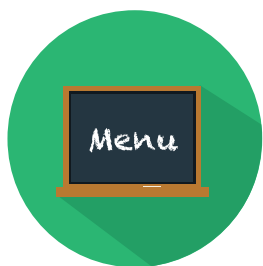
United States Department of Agriculture



MiPlato
MisVictorias

Preparación de comidas en familia

Las comidas en familia en torno a la mesa del comedor son la oportunidad perfecta para pasar tiempo juntos. Pruebe estos consejos para ayudar a su familia a disfrutar de las comidas juntos.



Planee las comidas

Para evitar el estrés a la hora de la comida, planee un menú semanal y colóquelo en un lugar visible a la vista de todos, como en una pizarra en la cocina.



Prepare con antelación

Tenga los ingredientes para la semana listos. Después de hacer la compra, corte las verduras y mida los ingredientes por adelantado para que luego sea más fácil preparar las comidas.



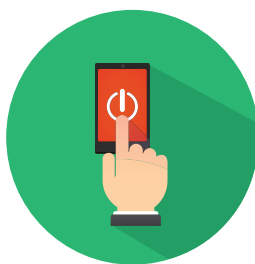
Haga de la hora de la comida una prioridad

Reserve tiempo para las comidas en familia cuando planee el horario de la semana. Intenten cocinar, comer y limpiar todos juntos!



Piense en otras opciones además de la cena

Si las noches son demasiado ajetreadas para su familia, considere otros momentos para comer en familia como un “brunch” durante el fin de semana o incluso compartir unos refrigerios por la tarde.



Las comidas deben ser divertidas y enfocadas

La mesa del comedor tiene que ser un lugar tranquilo y sin distracciones electrónicas. Aprovechen el tiempo en familia para “desconectar”, interactuar y prestar atención los unos a los otros.



Listar más consejos

After-School Snack Energy Bars



Adult: No

Hands-On Time: 10 minutes

Total Time: 10 minutes

Makes: 16 pieces

These fruit-and-nut bars are super-easy to make (no adult needed!) and easy to adapt to your own tastes. Love pecans? Use all pecans. More of a mixed-nut person? Use mixed nuts. Keep trying these bars with different ingredients: we also like toasted sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, and/or pumpkin seeds in place of some of the nuts. We're not sure why, but every now and then these don't turn out quite right—they're crumbly instead of firm. If this happens, use it as a fruit or yogurt topping, and call it "granola"!

Kitchen Gear

- Cutting board
- Sharp knife (adult needed)
- 8 x 8-inch pan
- Wax or parchment paper
- Measuring cup
- Measuring spoons
- Medium-sized bowl
- Small bowl
- Large spoon
- Dinner knife
- Plastic wrap

Ingredients

- ½ cup chopped lightly toasted nuts (one kind or a combination of almonds, walnuts, and pecans). To toast nuts, put them on a small baking sheet in a 350-degree oven until they are fragrant and look a shade darker, around 5 minutes.
- ¾ cup dried fruit (one kind or a combination of raisins, currants, dried cranberries, and/or chopped dates, prunes, apricots, and peaches)
- ¾ cup quick oats
- ¾ cup crispy rice cereal
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened shredded coconut (if you like)
- ½ cup almond or peanut butter
- ¼ cup honey or maple syrup
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract



Before You Begin

- Wash your hands with soap and water and dry them.
- Clean the counter top with a sponge.
- Gather all your kitchen gear and ingredients and put them on the counter.
- Scrub all the fruits and vegetables and lay them out on a dishtowel to dry.
- Prepare your ingredients, which means you may have to do something before you get started with the instructions.

Instructions

1. Line the pan with wax or parchment paper and leave enough hanging over the sides so that you can use it to cover the bars later. (You will need a piece a little more than twice the size of the bottom of the pan.)
2. Put the nuts, dried fruit, oats, rice cereal, and coconut in the medium-sized bowl and toss well.
3. Put the almond or peanut butter and honey or syrup in the small bowl and microwave until the mixture is softened, about 30 seconds (depending on your microwave). Stir until smooth. Add the vanilla and stir again until smooth.
4. Pour the warm mixture over the fruit-nut mixture in the medium-sized bowl and mix with the spoon until well combined.
5. Dump the mixture into the prepared pan and pat down as hard as you can. You want to make the bars solid (rather than airy). Using the overhanging wax paper, cover the bars completely. Cover the pan with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 4 hours and up to 1 week.
6. Using the knife, cut into 16 pieces.

Safety Tip:

Get an adult's permission and help with all sharp knives, appliances (blender and food processor), the stove or oven, and hot ingredients.

Source: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/chop-chop-magazine/Pages/After-School-Snack-Energy-Bars.aspx>