



My mind matters too

Positive mental health for the young child

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What is mental health?

- Mental health is about how we think and feel. Some people call mental health 'emotional health' or 'wellbeing', it may be what others call happiness.
- Mental health is much more than being free of mental illness such as depression. It means feeling good about yourself and coping well with the everyday pressures of life.
- Young children are thinking and feeling beings too. Their mental health is just as important as their physical health.



Why is positive mental health important for young children?

- Positive mental health not only prevents mental ill health but also allows children to enjoy life, believe in their abilities and cope with life's ups and downs.
- Positive mental health helps children to think clearly, develop socially, learn new skills and build self-esteem.
- Positive mental health helps children to develop a positive mental outlook that provides the foundation for a mentally healthy adulthood.

Did you know?



Over 8,000 children aged under 10 years old suffer from severe depression.

1 in 10 children and young people aged 5 - 16 suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder - that is around 3 children in every class.

However...

Simple steps can be taken to promote your child's mental health and reduce the risk of mental ill-health.



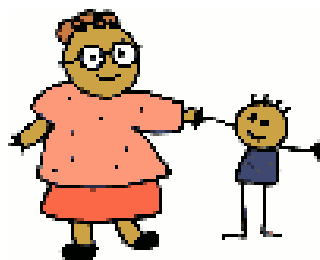
Love and affection

For young children, care and development are strongly linked. The bond between child and parent or carer is crucial to the development of the child – affecting physical growth as well as mental wellbeing.

Very young children need secure and consistent relationships with other people in order to thrive, learn and adapt to their surroundings. This may also impact their ability to form good future relationships.

Make sure your child knows you love them and are proud of them. Remember to praise your child for trying not just succeeding. Doing so helps young children to feel safe and comforted.

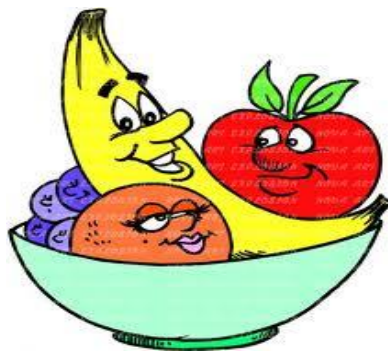
Such feelings of security increases children's capacity to learn and to develop both mentally and physically. Even when things are busy or stressful, a word, a cuddle or a hug can reassure your child a huge amount.



Healthy eating

Most of us are aware of the link between a healthy diet and physical health. However, evidence linking diet and mental health is growing at a rapid pace.

As well as its impact on short and long-term mental health, the evidence indicates that food plays an important role in the development, management and prevention of specific mental health problems such as depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).



A balanced mood and feelings of wellbeing can be protected by ensuring that your child is provided with a healthy and balanced diet. This includes:

- Having a minimum of five portions, daily, of fresh fruit and vegetables
- Eating regular meals throughout the day and most definitely not skipping breakfast
- Eating less high sugar and processed foods
- Maintaining an adequate fluid intake- especially water
- Eating a variety of foods

Keep Active

Whilst the physical benefits of physical activity have long been known, there is growing evidence that being physically active is strongly associated with mental health and that being **inactive** can contribute to poor mental health.

All types of physical activity have the potential to promote mental wellbeing and prevent mental health problems, as long as they are appropriate to the age and health status of your child.

Encourage your child to take part in physical exercise. For example:

- Play outdoor games with friends
- Run
- Dance
- Walk
- Ride a bike



Whatever the activity, make fun the focus.

Physical activity can promote mental wellbeing and prevent mental health problems in your child by:

- Raising your child's confidence and self-esteem
- Improving thinking skills
- Encouraging more social behaviour
- Promoting a positive mood

Communicate

As a parent you need to be aware of the importance of interacting and communicating with your child. Even young children can understand about feelings if you give them a chance to talk about them.



Good communication with your child is about:

- encouraging them to talk to you but also being able to really listen and responding in a sensitive way to all kinds of things – not just nice things but also anger, embarrassment, sadness or fear
- Watching your child's facial expression and body language. Listening isn't just about hearing words, but also trying to understand what's behind those words.

Your child may need lots of encouragement and positive feedback to get talking. They may be desperate to talk you when you are busy doing something else. This might mean stopping what you are doing and listening.



If you are worried about your child's mental health, you could:

- Talk to your doctor - they may refer you to special services for children and families.
- Talk to your child's school - the school may be able to help sort out difficulties, provide extra support and make allowances for your child.

Further sources of help

- Young Minds 0800 018 2138 www.youngminds.org.uk
- Lifeline 0808 808 8000 www.lifelinehelpline.info/



