

How to have Meaningful Conversations with Youth about Mental Health

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Great Lakes Mental Health
Technology Transfer Center
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January 2021

MHTTC Words Matter

The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND
ACCEPTING OF
DIVERSE CULTURES,
GENDERS,
PERSPECTIVES,
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED/
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH
OUR ACTIONS,
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

Adapted from: https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide_2019ed_v1_20190809-Web.pdf



Thank You for Joining Us!

A few housekeeping items:

- If you are having technical issues, please individually message Stephanie Behlman in the **chat section at the bottom of your screen** and they will be happy to assist you.
- Please put any questions for the speaker in the **Q & A section, also at the bottom of the screen**. The speaker will respond to questions.

Thank You for Joining Us!

A few more housekeeping items:

- You will be directed to a link at the end of the presentation to a very short survey – we would really appreciate it if you could fill it out. It takes about 3 minutes.
- The recording of this webinar along with the slides will be available on our website.
- Certificates of attendance will be sent out to all who attended the full session. They will be sent via email.

A close-up photograph of several social media icons on white keyboard keys. The icons include Pinterest (red), Snapchat (yellow), Instagram (purple/pink), Facebook (blue), and Twitter (blue). The keys are arranged in a grid pattern, and the background is a light gray surface.

Follow Us On Social Media!

Facebook and Twitter:

- @GreatLakesATTC
- @GMhttc
- @GLPTTC

Presenter



Angela Begres

**HOW TO HAVE MEANINGFUL
CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUTH
ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH**

Angela Begres, LCSW



Partners for Healthy Lives

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- How to recognize and talk about mental health with youth
- Strategies on how to start a conversation
- How to support youth if they are not ready to talk
- Types of professionals and evidence-based treatments for mental health



A calendar page is visible in the background, showing dates from 1 to 28. The calendar is slightly out of focus and has a light orange tint. A white rectangular box with a black border is centered over the calendar, containing the text "HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?".

HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?

A photograph of a wooden branch floating on a body of water. The water is dark and has many concentric ripples around the branch, suggesting it has just been placed there. The lighting is soft, creating a calm and serene atmosphere. The text 'GROUNDING EXERCISE' is centered over the image in a white, sans-serif font, enclosed in a thin white rectangular border.

GROUNDING EXERCISE

MAKING MENTAL HEALTH TALKS A PRIORITY

- As many as 1 in 5 children in the U.S. will experience mental illness.
- Validate your child's feelings and ask open-ended questions.
- Though difficult, it's critical to also talk about suicide.
- If your child is struggling, talk with their primary care provider.

**"ONE OF THE GREATEST PROTECTIVE FACTORS
FOR YOUTH IS A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH
AT LEAST ONE TRUSTED ADULT."**

STRESS LOOKS DIFFERENT AT DIFFERENT AGES:

- Kids and teens handle long-term stress and other mental health issues in dramatically different ways:
 - Some withdraw and isolate
 - Others act out
 - Some suffer in silence

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

National 4-H Council issued a survey in September 2020 with The Harris Poll to explore teen's perceptions and experiences around mental health, with shocking results.

- 81% of teens say mental health is a significant issue for young people in the U.S., and 64% of teens believe that the experience of COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on their generation's mental health.
- 7 in 10 teens have experienced struggles with mental health.
- 55% of teens say they've experienced anxiety, 45% excessive stress, and 43% depression.
- 61% of teens said that COVID-19 pandemic has increased their feeling of loneliness.
- **82% of teens desire America to talk more openly and honestly about mental health issues in this country.**
- 79% of teens wish there was an inclusive environment or safe space for people in school to talk about mental health.

HOW TO
RECOGNIZE YOUR
YOUTH IS STRESS

Change in sleeping or eating patterns

Increased aches and pains

Increased focus on their body

Difficulty separating

Withdrawal

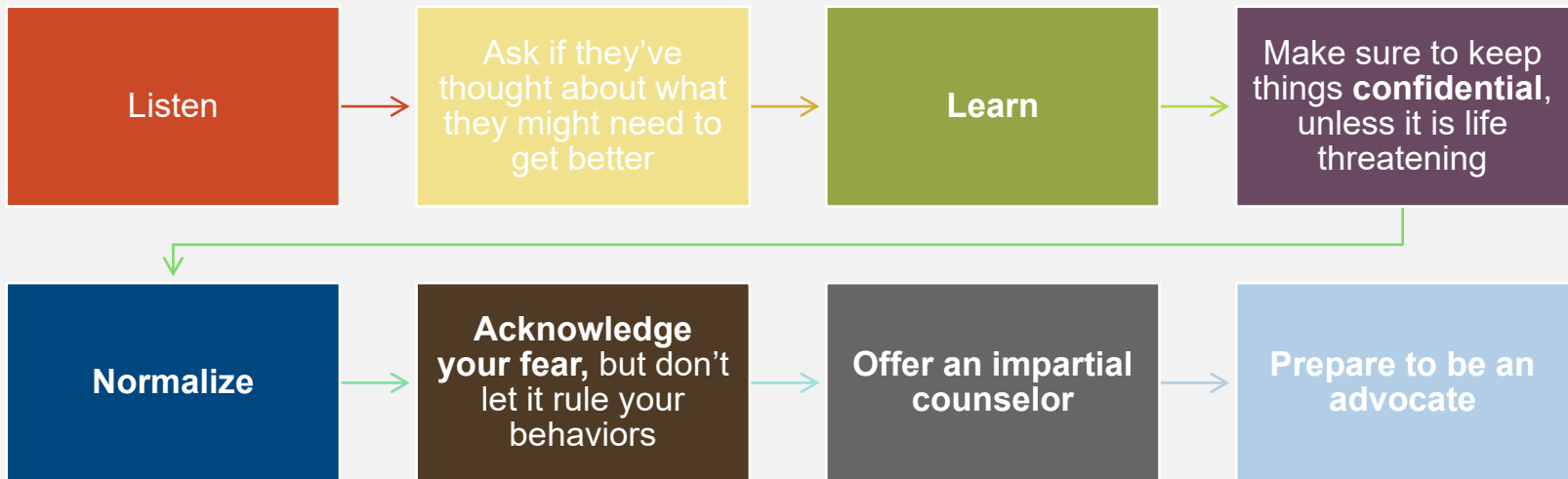
REASONS WHY YOUTH
AVOID TALKING TO
THEIR PARENTS ABOUT
THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

- I don't know how my parents will react
- My parents will be sad or disappointed
- My parents will be angry or won't take me seriously
- My parents will ask too many questions
- My parents already have enough to worry about

A photograph of two women sitting on a windowsill, facing each other and talking. The woman on the left is wearing a dark sweater and blue jeans, and the woman on the right is wearing a red sweater and blue jeans. They are both smiling and gesturing with their hands. The window behind them shows a brick building with blue window frames. The scene is lit with natural light from the window, creating a warm and intimate atmosphere. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the image, containing the title text.

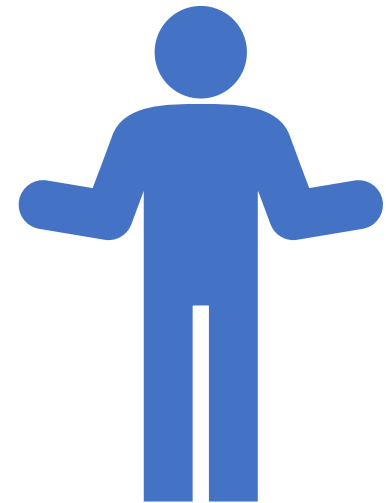
HOW TO TALK WITH KIDS AND TEENS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

STEPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN



DON'T....

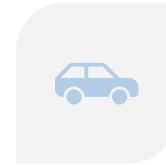
- Minimize how they are feeling
- Let your emotions rule your response
- Tell your child what they SHOULD do
- Argue if you encounter resistance from your child
- Make excuses or blame others
- Compare your child to their siblings



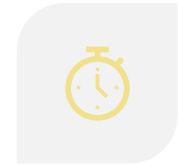
MINIMIZE
DISTRACTIONS



AVOID TEXTING
OR SCROLLING
THROUGH
SOCIAL MEDIA



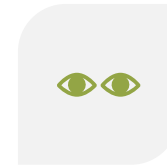
PICK A QUIET
PRIVATE PLACE



MAKE SURE YOU
HAVE SET ASIDE
ENOUGH TIME TO
TALK



SILENCE YOUR
PHONE



AVOID LOOKING
AT YOUR
PHONE/WATCH



VALIDATE WHAT YOUR CHILD SAYS

- **Nonverbal validation:** You can validate your adolescent simply with your body language.
- **Accurate reflection:** Summarizing your observations without judgement.
- **Label feelings:** You can show that you recognize how they feel by saying something like, “It seems like that really upsets you.”
- **Perspective empathy:** Even if you don’t personally agree with their reaction to something, try to understand their perspective.

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- Open-ended questions require thought and introspection and are not often answered with one or two words. The goal of open-ended questions is to gather information and keep a conversation going.
- Try to ask questions in a way that is focused more on fact-finding and less on passing judgment.
- If your child or teen isn't the talkative type, you can try making observations and asking if they're correct. For example, if you noticed your teen isn't spending as much time with friends, point this out and ask why.

OPEN-ENDED
QUESTION
EXAMPLES

How are you feeling?

I've noticed you _____. How are you feeling?

How would you like things to be different?

I know _____. (Acknowledge something that is happening in their life.) Anything you want to talk about?



USE EXAMPLES

- For young children, it can be helpful to find ways for them to represent their emotions visually:
 - Read picture books with stories whose characters express different emotions.
 - Use a daily emoji chart and ask kids to pick the emoji that represents how they feel that day.
 - Have a feelings thermometer and have kids explain the level of their emotions.
- For older kids and teens, hearing stories of other young people who have struggled with mental health issues can reassure them that they aren't alone.
- Many young celebrities have been open about dealing with things like depression and anxiety, so those could be stories worth sharing.

**LISTEN WITHOUT
TRYING TO FIX IT**

It can be hard to step back when all you want to do is make things better but trying to 'fix' a mental health issue simply doesn't work. Instead:

Listen to what the youth needs.

Connect the youth with resources like doctors or therapist who can help.

Be their support system as they navigate this new challenge.

The image features a large, stylized orange speech bubble hanging from a dark grey string. The bubble is the central focus and has a soft, rounded shape. Overlaid on the left side of the bubble is a black rectangular box with a thin border. Inside this box, the text "SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background is white and contains several other speech bubbles in various colors (blue, green, red, purple, yellow) that are out of focus, creating a sense of depth and a community atmosphere.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE



TALK ABOUT STIGMA

Stigma is defined as a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, avoid, and discriminate against people with mental illnesses.

The most significant consequence of stigma is that people don't get the treatment they need.

It hurts to think that someone would harbor biases toward your child, but the truth is others may judge them. Instead of making false assurances that this won't happen, be honest about stigma.

- Address it directly and get them to think about why someone might react in a judgmental way.
- Help them to recognize stigma as outside of themselves and not personalize.
- Remind them that while stigma does exist, most people they interact with will simply be concerned and want to help because they care.

TRY NOT TO TAKE IT PERSONALLY IF
YOUR CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON
DOESN'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT
WHAT'S GOING ON – DON'T GIVE UP.



STARTING THE CONVERSATION

F.A.C.T.S.*

Feelings

- Expressing hopelessness about the future.

Actions

- Displaying severe/overwhelming pain or distress.

Changes

- Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior including withdrawal from friends or changes in social activities such as: anger or hostility, or changes in sleep.

Threats

- Talking about, writing about, or making plans for suicide.

Situations

- Expressing stressful situations including those that involve loss, change, create personal humiliation, or involve getting into trouble at home, in school or with the law. These kinds of situations can serve as triggers for suicide.

*This is an updated version of the FACTS handout available in the Lifelines Curriculum and "Making Educators Partners"

HOW TO TALK ABOUT SUICIDE

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among people ages 15 to 24

How to Begin the Conversation:

- Have suicide crisis resources available
- Mention what signs/behaviors prompted you to ask about how they are feeling

Ask the Question:

- Ask directly about suicide
- "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
- "Are you thinking about ending your life?"

Validate the Persons' Experience

- Be willing to listen and allow emotional expression
- Recognize that the situation is serious
- Don't pass judgment
- Reassure that help is available
- Don't promise secrecy
- Don't leave the person alone



SEEKING OUT HELP

- Share available resources
- Be willing to make the call, or take part in the call to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
 - 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Let the person know that you are willing to go with them to see a professional when they are ready.
- If you feel the situation is critical, take the person to the closest Emergency Room or call 9-1-1.

SEEKING
PROFESSIONAL
HELP

- Psychotherapy (“talk therapy”) – virtual or in person
- Medications
- Family counseling
- Support for parents

PRACTICING SELF-CARE

- Think about what has helped you cope in the past
- Try to take time to eat, rest, and relax, even for short periods
- Try to keep reasonable working hours
- Talk with friends, loved ones, or other people you trust for support



RESOURCES

- **Findtreatment.gov**
- **National Helpline:** Treatment, referral, and information 24/7
 - <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline/>
 - 1800-662-Help (4357)
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
 - www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
 - 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- **Crisis Text Line**
 - www.crisistextline.org
 - Text “START” to 741-741

Stay in touch:

Email: Angela@partnersforhealthylives.org

Instagram: [@Partnersforhealthylives](https://www.instagram.com/Partnersforhealthylives)

[Making Mental Health Talks a Priority Handout](#)

- [Partnerforhealthylives](#)

[FACTS Handout](#)



QUESTIONS

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