



Improving Mental Health

Mental health is just as important as physical health. For example, depression can be just as crippling as a broken arm or leg. Seeking mental health treatment is about taking action as soon as you notice a problem, so your child or other family member can get the help they need and feel better.

Mental health support can play an important role in protecting children from the effects of toxic stress. Counseling and other kinds of mental health treatment can be helpful for children who have faced difficulties in life. This kind of support may also help you if you've experienced trauma as a child or adult.

If your child has experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), or if someone has expressed concern about your child's mental health or behavior, you might consider seeking professional help. Another reason to seek help is if your child's physical health seems to be affected. Some examples of this include if your child:

- gets colds or stomach aches often
- has difficulty falling or staying asleep
- screams or cries a lot
- has a "flat" expression that doesn't seem to show much emotion



- is anxious or gets very upset when separating from a caregiver
- is defiant or has frequent tantrums
- shows the behaviors of a younger child, such as clinginess or unexpected toileting accidents
- has symptoms of asthma, which can get worse under stress

Share any worries you may have with your health care providers. They can connect you with a mental health specialist who is a good fit for your family. You may be referred to a social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist. Sharing your child's struggles, and your own worries, is an important first step. You can also explore lifestyle choices to support better emotional health. These choices include: eating healthy food, getting regular exercise, promoting healthy sleep routines, practicing mindfulness, and having caring, trusted relationships to lean on. These activities will support healthy minds and healthy bodies for parents and children alike!

SOURCES

- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2018). Sleep. Retrieved from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/sleep/Pages/default.aspx>
- Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2012). The Science of Neglect: The Persistent Absence of Responsive Care Disrupts the Developing Brain: Working Paper No. 12. Retrieved from <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/The-Science-of-Neglect-The-Persistent-Absence-of-Responsive-Care-Disrupts-the-Developing-Brain.pdf>
- Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2014). A decade of science informing policy: The story of the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. Retrieved from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/decade-science-informing-policy-story-national-scientific-council-developing-child>
- Burke Harris, N. (2018). The deepest well: Healing the long-term effects of childhood adversity. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Khoury, B., Sharma, M., Rush, S. E., & Fournier, C. (2015). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for healthy individuals: A meta-analysis. *J Psychosom Res*, 78(6), 519-528. doi:10.1016/j.jpsychores.2015.03.009
- Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2018). Chapter 3: Active children and adolescents.
- Oh, D. L., Jerman, P., Silverio Marques, S., Koita, K., Purewal Boparai, S. K., Burke Harris, N., & Bucci, M. (2018). Systematic review of pediatric health outcomes associated with childhood adversity. *BMC Pediatr*, 18(1), 83. doi:10.1186/s12887-018-1037-7
- Purewal Boparai, S. K., Au, V., Koita, K., Oh, D. L., Briner, S., Burke Harris, N., & Bucci, M. (2018). Ameliorating the biological impacts of childhood adversity: A review of intervention programs. *Child Abuse Negl*, 81, 82-105. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.04.014
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2018). Early Childhood Trauma: Effects. Retrieved from <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/early-childhood-trauma/effects>
- Yousafzai, A. K., Rasheed, M. A., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2013). Annual Research Review: Improved nutrition--pathway to resilience. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry*, 54(4), 367-377. doi:10.1111/jcpp.12019

