



Promoting Mental Health

A child's mental health is just as important as their physical health. Mental health includes

- How children feel about themselves
- How they connect with others
- How they manage their emotions—joy, excitement, pride, love, sadness, anger, fear, loneliness, and more

This tip sheet provides ideas for promoting children's mental health from infancy to adulthood.

INFANCY

- Touch and eye contact are great ways to let babies know they are loved.
- Patting, hugging, cuddling, and rocking make a baby feel loved, calm, and cared for.
- Take care of your own emotional and mental health, which affects your baby's mental health.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

- Smiles, hugs, and encouraging words help a child develop a positive self-image.
- Help your child become a confident decision-maker. Offer 2 or 3 choices about what they want to wear, eat, or play.
- Talk about your feelings so your child can learn how to express how they are feeling and why.



MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Model behaviors you want your children to learn by



- Being a good listener, so children learn to listen to others.
- Being polite, so children learn to say please and thank you.
- Controlling your behavior, so children know how to act in different, and sometimes difficult, situations.
- Giving children, including children with special health care needs, responsibilities, such as making their beds, helping at mealtimes, or helping in the yard.

These activities also build your child's self-esteem.

ADOLESCENCE

- Praise your teen's efforts, and compliment their successes.
- Show your teen affection, and talk about how they can show affection to others in age-appropriate ways.
- Help teens talk about, understand, and cope with their emotions—both big and little.
- Help teens understand different points of view.



Parents know their children best! If you are worried about your child's or teen's moods and behaviors, talk with their health care provider.

Visit the *Bright Futures Family Pocket Guide*, 3rd Edition for more information about promoting children's mental health.

Learn more at familyvoices.org/brightfuturesfamilyguide & aap.org/BFFamilyPocketGuide.