

Purpose of this Toolkit

All parents want to raise happy and well-adjusted children. The purpose of these information sheets is to educate families about positive mental health and everyday strategies for promoting mental health throughout the day. In studies exploring family needs, parents indicate that they want education on how to support their children's emotional wellbeing using holistic, strength-based approaches. In addition, parents want ideas for affordable family activities that are health-promoting and that help children cope with stress.^{1,2} Parents have noted that some of their biggest challenges revolve around too much screen time, obesity, lack of physical activity, and not knowing how to help their children process feelings and be mentally healthy.

About the Information Sheets

Content draws on current literature about what parents can do to help their children and family as a unit be mentally healthy. Each information sheet provides an overview of the topic, suggested parent strategies and family activities, user-friendly resources, and references. This toolkit is a part of the *Every Moment Counts* initiative developed to help all children and youth become mentally healthy in order to succeed in school, at home and in the community (refer to www.everymomentcounts.org for more information).

Five Family Mental Health Information Sheets

1. **Quality Family Time: The Essential Ingredient for Promoting Family Mental Health**
2. **Promoting Positive Mental Health in Families**
3. **Meaningful Mealtimes**
4. **Family Fun Time**
5. **Relax and Refresh**

How to Use These Resources?

- **Start with one.** Select and read one of the information sheets at a time, beginning with this one.
- **Commit to shared learning.** Encourage your spouse, or, another parent to read the information sheet too. Then, make a point to discuss the information together to share new insights and ways that you can embed new strategies and activities into your everyday family life. Talking about this information with a spouse or friend can help extend your learning and offer opportunities for parent-to-parent support.
- **Commit to shared doing.** As you discuss the information and suggested activities, identify one new way of interacting with your children and one new activity that you can realistically embed in your everyday family life. For example, you might make a habit of taking 5 minutes each day to talk to your children individually about their day and how they are feeling. Or, you may commit to having a minimum of 3 family meals each week. Talking about and making plans is an important first step to making healthy changes.
- **Use the resources.** Consider purchasing one of the books or using website materials to extend your learning and obtain more ideas for family activities.

Quality family time is important for children's mental health. It involves parental sensitivity and interactive time doing enjoyable activities together.



Quality Family Time: The Essential Ingredient for Promoting Family Mental Health

Studies have consistently found that quality family time is one of the most important contributors to children's mental health and adjustment to life.³ Quality time is also important for promoting family bonding. What influences the quality of time spent together? One factor is parental sensitivity in developing a positive emotional relationship with their child. This involves being able to recognize their child's emotional state and respond in a comforting way. Another aspect of quality time is having interactive time together. This refers to when children and parents are fully engaged in an activity together.

Other benefits of quality time include:

- Children feel important, loved, and that they 'matter'. Children who believe that they matter to their families (i.e. that they are important and make a difference in the world) are less likely to engage in aggressive behavior.³
- Children have a chance to talk about and process their daily experiences, thoughts, and feelings with a close adult. Parents have an opportunity to role model healthy communication of feelings and regulation of emotions.
- Parents have an opportunity to be a positive role model and communicate clear family rules. Children can model parents' behavior.
- Parents have an opportunity to observe and learn about their child's interests, strengths, and weaknesses in order to guide them in life choices.

Suggested Family Activities

There are many activities that promote happy and healthy children. The key is making them enjoyable and giving full attention to each other. Examples include: eating family meals, playing board games, attending religious events, doing chores together, cooking, and participating in sports. Children and youth appreciate both unplanned, spontaneous time together (e.g. driving in the car, doing chores together, informal play) as well as more structured and planned activities (e.g. vacations). Refer to the other Information Sheets for more ideas!

Resources

1. **Building Blocks for a Healthy Future Family Guide.** The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) developed a program called "Building Blocks for a Healthy Future" that emphasizes the importance of spending time together, healthy communication, establishing clear family rules, and being a positive role model. The Family Guide describing these building blocks in family-friendly language is available for download at <http://cacenter-ecmh.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/ParentGuideLong.pdf>.
2. **Child Development Institute.** Website - <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com>. The goal of the website is to promote healthy development so that children can reach their true potential for a successful and happy life. A wealth of information is provided for parents on child development, psychology, health, parenting, family activities, and other useful websites.

Every Moment Counts is committed to building capacity of all school personnel, families, and community providers to promote children's mental health and contribute to prevention and intervention of mental health challenges through professional education, website resources, and coaching. Website: www.everymomentcounts.org

Developed by occupational therapists. Occupational therapists (OT) are skilled in analyzing the interaction between the skills needed to successfully participate in an activity (e.g. play, mealtime, & social interaction within families) and how to modify the activity and/or environment in order to promote participation. In addition to having a sound knowledge of the sensory and motor requirements of a task, OTs are skilled in addressing the social and emotional aspects of participation.

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¹ Carroll, L., & Vickers, M. (2014). The role of families in health promotion: Family wisdom about health and wellness knowledge, strategies, and barriers. Retrieved on April 22, 2017, from <http://www.familyvoices.org/admin/miscdocs/files/FV-IMPACT-Issues-Brief.pdf>

² Coverdale, G. E., & Long, A. F. (2015). Emotional wellbeing and mental health: An exploration into health promotion in young people and families. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 135(1), 27-36.

³ Fernandez, G. (2012). Importance of family time of kids' mental health and adjustment to life. Retrieved from <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/psychology/importance-of-family-time-on-kids-mental-health-and-adjustment-to-life/>