Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness. “Mental health is a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity.” It involves ‘feeling good emotionally’ and ‘doing well’ in everyday function.

### What is Positive Mental Health?

Tune into and talk about the 4 characteristics of positive mental health with your children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic of Positive Mental Health</th>
<th>Parents: Tune into your child's feelings, thinking, and behavior; look for signs of positive mental health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Feeling good emotionally; positive affect or emotional state</td>
<td>Observe whether your child smiles during the day and looks happy and content. A goal is feeling good emotionally about three fourths of the day. Notice what activities and interactions make your child smile and feel happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Positive emotional state and social relationships</td>
<td>Tune into your child’s concentration and notice significant changes. Take an interest in her/his social relationships and encourage healthy friendships. Does your child have at least one good friend and enjoy time with friends?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ability to engage in functional activities (schoolwork, self-care, leisure, sleep)</td>
<td>Is your child able to complete everyday tasks such as homework, dressing, hygiene, eating, and sleep? Note changes in appetite (too little or too much) and sleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Coping with life stressors and being able to bounce back (resilience)</td>
<td>All people experience daily stressors (small and big). Tune into how your child copes with challenges (e.g. poor test grade, being teased) and problem solve solutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How to Promote Positive Mental Health?

Small moments make big differences in how children and youth feel and function throughout the day! Be a mental health promoter! Read the following mental health promotion ideas and activities and think about how you can embed them naturally into your everyday interactions with your child.

Be a Mental Health Promoter!
Mental Health Promotion Strategies: What Families Can Do

1. **Participate in enjoyable activities.** Experiencing positive emotions (e.g. joy, happiness, contentment) can be powerful ‘nutrients’ in helping people be mentally healthy. Help your child do activities that are meaningful and fun. When a child smiles during an activity and is intently engaged, you know that it is the just right activity.

2. **Make caring connections.** Close relationships provide meaning, support and a sense of belonging. Make a point to spend some quality time together each day. Examples: Have a 5 minute ‘check in’ time before bed; give a hug; offer to help clean her/his bedroom together.

3. **Focus on character strengths.** Tune into your child’s character strengths (e.g. humor, persistence, kindness, courage), label them, and help them use them. Example: For children who are nurturing and kind, encourage them to volunteer at animal shelters or nursing homes.

4. **Talk about feelings.** Promote emotional literacy - the ability to identify, understand and respond to emotions in oneself and others in a healthy way. Make a point to ask ‘How are you feeling?’ every day and take time to listen to what your child has to say. Let your child know it’s OK to experience and talk about negative emotions like anger, jealousy, and fear.

5. **Talk about mental health.** Make positive mental health a natural part of everyday conversations. Make a point to say, “That taking care of your mental health is as important as taking care of your physical health!”

6. **Promote health behaviors.** Regular exercise, good sleep, and eating a healthy diet all contribute to one’s mental health. Encourage 30 minutes of active play or exercise each day. Take a walk together. Even 5 minutes of walking can have a positive effect on mood by decreasing feelings of anxiety and depression.

7. **Offer calm moments.** Do activities that help people ‘be in the moment’ such as relaxation, yoga and mindfulness approaches. Teach your child how to do deep breathing when stressed (Inhale to a count of 5, hold for 3 seconds, exhale for a count of 5, repeat 5 times). Build in everyday ways to relax as a family (e.g. morning stretches, TV free zone).

8. **Think positive.** Promote positive self-talk. People who think positive tend to be happier, healthier and cope better during challenging times. Be a ‘realistic optimist’ by putting situations in perspective. E.g. “Today was a difficult day, but we will work together to make tomorrow a better one.” Keep a gratitude journal with your child.

9. **Foster kindness.** Being kind, thoughtful, and caring with others increases feelings of happiness. Parents, model acts of kindness. Encourage small, spontaneous acts of kindness (e.g. giving a compliment, smiling at one another) during daily family interactions. Plan larger acts of kindness (e.g. make a meal and deliver it to a family in needs, rake leaves for an elderly neighbor).

## Resources

1. **What every child needs for good mental health.** Mental Health America (MHA) is a non-profit organization geared toward promoting mental wellness for all Americans. The article “What Every Child Needs for Good Mental Health” is a guide for parents in promoting positive mental health in their children. It provides a basic understanding positive mental health, how to encourage and promote confidence and self-esteem, the importance of play, and suggestions on guidance and discipline. Link: [http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/every-child-needs](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/every-child-needs)

2. **Embedded Strategies tab on the Every Moment Counts website.** [http://www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org)

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For Further Information Contact: Susan Bazyk at s.bazyk@csuohio.edu

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