



A Monthly Insight of Practical Tools to Help Your Family

Wellness Today

For Parents & Families

Warning Signs

Early recognition of your child struggling is key to overcoming challenges. Signs your child may be struggling emotionally include:

- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Mood or behavior changes including appetite and sleep
- Withdrawing or isolating
- Taking excessive risks or behaving recklessly
- Repeated unexplained body aches and pains
- Anxiety interfering with activities
- Frequent anger, irritability, criticizing, or tantrums
- Change in academic performance
- Preoccupation with death or dying
- Talking about wanting to die or being a burden

When to Get Help

If your child is not responding to helpful support being offered, not improving, or worsening, seek help by consulting with a medical or mental health professional.

What to Do with Sadness

While it is nice to be happy, sadness is a healthy and normal emotional experience alerting us to what is needed from self and others. Sadness is necessary to having a healthy full range of human emotions. Sadness differs from depression. Sadness is typically triggered by a difficult, hurtful, challenging, or disappointing event, experience, or situation. The emotion of sadness tends to be distractible. Behaviors can vary from having less energy/motivation, withdrawing, crying, having anger/irritability, being rigid, or talking less, to name a few. As children and teens develop skills to navigate sadness, their resilience to life challenges can increase.

Helping Those in Elementary School

When experiencing sadness, sometimes distraction, thinking positively or taking a different perspective can help; however at times it is difficult, if not seemingly impossible, to shift attention and emotions. This occurs due to a change in brain functioning as the regions of

the brain responsible for problem-solving, communicating, starting and completing tasks, understanding different points of view, and regulating emotions, among other essential tasks, work far less effectively.

Physical movement can help reactivate these areas of the brain, increasing the ability to talk about what is occurring, why they are feeling sad, and finding solutions to the problems.

Creativity can be used in moving the body. Some ideas include:

- Jumping Jacks
- Running
- Riding a bike
- Bouncing a balloon or beach ball
- Pounding play dough flat
- Passing a ball
- Throwing rolled up socks at a safe surface

After moving, children are more able to shift their focus and emotions.

Helping Those in Middle School


Talking about and understanding

Move It!
Help reactivate the regions of the brain essential to working through strong emotions by physical movement.

How to Get Help

If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally or behaviorally, support is available. Begin by talking with a medical doctor or a mental health professional.

Below are resources available in the community to help:

- **Hope4Utah** provides resources for parents on talking with children and teens about suicide and mental health, as well as offering practical guidance for accessing help. www.hope4utah.com
- **SafeUT**  app provides real-time crisis intervention through a phone call, chat, or submitting confidential tips to school administrators on bullying, threats, or violence.
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** offers information regarding mental health conditions and support groups for families. www.nami.org
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** (English and Spanish) 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress. 1-800-273-8255
- **Crisis Text Line** is the free, 24/7, confidential text message service for people in crisis. Text HOME to 7417414.

emotions is a skill. As you help your child explore answers to the following questions, you help their ability to talk about and resolve feelings in a healthy and productive.

- What am I sad about? Sometimes it helps to consider, "When did I begin to feel sad? Where was I? Who was I interacting with?"
- What am I concerned this means?
- Is this something I want to feel differently about? If so, what am I willing to do?
- Is there anything I can do to change the situation?
- Are there other ways to think about the situation?

Helping Those in High School

“You don’t get it” can be a phrase heard or felt by those expressing their sadness. Feeling heard or understood can decrease emotional intensity, and increase connection. The following techniques for *initially* responding to a person who is feeling sad can sound simple. To do it well, it is important to apply these techniques without giving advice or trying to cheer the other person up. It is after the person feels the listener hears and understands (though not necessarily agrees with) what is being communicated that he or she is more likely to receive advice. Dr. David Burns of Stanford recommends the following:

- **The Disarming Technique:** Find some truth in what the person is saying, even if it is unreasonable or unfair.
- **Thought and Feeling Empathy:** Put yourself in the person’s shoes, trying to see the world through their eyes, and communicate you can see this. Communicate this by paraphrasing the speaker’s words, and feeling empathy, which is acknowledging how the person is probably feeling, based on what they said. Ask throughout the conversation if what has been heard is accurate. Allow for

clarifications.

- **Inquiry:** Ask gentle, probing questions to learn more about what the person is thinking and feeling.

Is It Depression?

If one or more of the following signs persist, it may be depression, and professional help should be sought:

- Frequent sadness, crying
- Hopelessness
- Decreased interest in activities or inability to enjoy previously favorite activities
- Persistent boredom/low energy
- Isolating, poor communication
- Low self-esteem and guilt
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability or anger
- Difficulty with relationships
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses such as headaches and stomach aches
- Poor concentration
- A major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Talk of or efforts to run away from home
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior

Disclaimer—The information in this newsletter is a starting place and might not be effective for every child or every situation. Mental health conditions are complex, as people differ widely in their conditions and responses, and interactions with other conditions. Interventions and treatments are best evaluated and adapted by a qualified clinician to meet individual needs.

This newsletter is produced by Hope4Utah, a nonprofit organization providing trainings, resources and supports to prevent, intervene, and respond to suicides and to improve mental health. Articles contributed by Jessica Williamson, LCSW. Jessica specializes in mental health treatment of children, teens, and adults at her a private practice in South Jordan, Utah.