



MENTAL HEALTH MONDAYS



Key Takeaways – May 26, 2020 | 2 p.m.

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“Meet them where they’re at: Providing social support that matches your child’s needs”

Social support is necessary for behavioral/mental health and physical health. Strong social support has been associated with heart health, a healthy immune system, eating habits, healthy weight, improved sleep, lower rates of depression and anxiety, less abusive behavior, higher academic achievement, personal growth, and much more.

1. **The relationship of social support and stress.** Social support is believed to buffer against stress in a variety of ways. Human interaction may tranquilize or calm the body’s physical reactions to stress. We can find solutions to problems through our social connections. Social support may even be able to change some of our beliefs. Social support communicates, “I’m not alone.”
2. **Types of social support.** *Emotional support.* That’s creating the space where your child can express thoughts and feelings or vent. Emotional support can be expressing empathy, care, concern or communicating their value and your love for them. *Social companionship* is time for leisure. This can provide distraction and the opportunity for positive emotions. *Informational support* provides information, suggestions or advice. My preference is to always ask for permission, such as “do you mind if I tell you what I might do in this situation?” It may make the child feel more in control and more open. *Instrumental support* is hands-on, material support. *Appraisal support* is important for someone’s self-evaluation and could involve praise or drawing on their strength. Support is not only how you express it or meant it, but how it’s perceived. While you may be trying to help someone through a difficult situation, that may not be how it’s perceived. The kind of support we need varies and may change over time and situation.
3. **Personality may inform the type of support that we deliver,** but we shouldn’t make assumptions because we could miss the mark of the need a child. If a child is introverted, they may want to manage on their own first before coming to someone, but they may also be suffering in silence. For the child that is more sensitive or emotionally reactive, when we jump in with suggestions, it might become overwhelming for that child and add more pressure. A strong-willed child may resist our taking the lead.

4. **Assessing your child's needs begins with assessing yourself.** What kind of support do you need? It's not uncommon to default to what works for us and assume it will work for someone else, too. Being clear of your own needs helps ensure you are not imposing your own preferences on your child. It's also helpful to know what our No. 1 go-to is. Are you a reassure-er? Fixer doer, solution-finder? What is your own comfort with emotional distress, and how do you react? It's important to know how we react, put that aside and focus on the child.
5. **Observe.** This is particularly important for younger children who may not know and communicate their needs. Look to their emotions to see what we can learn about the child's experience from what we are observing. If they are experiencing sadness, we know that's a universal emotion that captures actual or anticipated loss. It signals a need for help or comfort. Fear means the individual has made an assessment that there's a threat that might be real or imagined. It might not be a fear you have, but it's real to him or her. Anger is over an injustice or an obstacle that's keeping them from reaching an important goal. Another thing to look for is how your child responds to you when you use your go to support strategy or when you try a new strategy. Sometimes you need to use trial and error. There's always risk associated, because we can't always anticipate how people will respond, but we can always alter course or repair. Don't be afraid to try something new. Anticipating the parents' response is one of the biggest barriers to kids seeking social support. "I don't want to be a burden." "I know that my mom or dad or grandmother has a lot going on."
6. **Just ask.** They might need some prompting. It lets them know there is an invitation to request the support that they need. You must also consider the tone. It's important to be present. It's important to create psychological safety and create a space for them to open up. Allow them to be vulnerable and communicate without fear of consequence. Asking will also facilitate their self-knowledge and improve their ability to communicate their needs to others. This will generalize to other relationships and sets the blueprint for future relationships. It's important for them to know what their needs are and be able to communicate them with others.
7. **Be empathetic.** Whatever it is, it's true for him or her, even if you don't agree with it. This is their reaction. It's also important to know that recognizing and validating someone's emotions is not the same as saying their behavior is OK. Such as, "It's not OK to lash out at others, but it is OK to be disappointed when things don't work out how they should."
8. **Demonstrate confidence** that you can handle it. Really try to keep your emotions in check because it communicates to the child that you are capable. It also means that child is more likely to come back to you in the future.



9. **Know when to seek help.** If you are not sure if something is normal, or you have questions, it's OK to have your child do an initial evaluation with a mental health professional who can help determine if behavior is typical for situation or developmental stage or there's something more serious going on. I would also consider seeking help from a professional if there are difficulties in a relationship that persist and intensify or exceed a family's ability to cope. High risk behavior, safety concerns, when there's a big change in behavior or significant stress with no identifiable trigger or a reaction is more intense than you think is warranted for that situation are good signs for professional help. Or if the issue is causing functional impairment such as impacting eating, sleeping, academic performance, or relationships. It's also important to seek help if a child or teen asks for it. By asking for help to see someone, they are showing they have a feeling of hope.

Questions from viewers:

Q: What is the best technique to use for anxiety in kids?

A: I would just ask, such as "I see you are stressed and anxious." That helps them be able to identify the feeling. If they can communicate, see what response they give. "What would you help you feel better?" If they aren't sure about strategies, you can show some things that they can do to help manage such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation. Even a simple scan of the environment and engaging the senses can help take focus off internal experience and things that are fueling the anxiety feeling. If I'm focused on my surroundings, I'm less focused on my internal struggles. I discourage avoidance. The more they avoid, the bigger the mountain feels to climb. It's great if you can help them master coping strategies to manage the physical and the thoughts associated with anxiety.

Q: Tips for separating our own triggered emotions so we can properly respond?

A: Take time to self-reflect. Try to notice the same reactions in ourselves. Be aware of the emotion and see what you can learn from it. How can you get your needs met? Maybe you need to let go; you are taking on too much. Maybe it's time for your child to take on more responsibility. Maybe it's triggering things from our own childhood. Pause and reflect. Certain emotions are designed to be triggered. Use some of the same strategies. Are you getting heated and angry? Recognize it, pause and reflect. We are all humans and doing the best that we can.



Q: Mental health is critical. What should we do in our daily routines to strengthen it?

A: Get back to some of the basics, including nutrition, sleep and being active. It's all about establishing balance. Getting sleep at a biological level affects the chemicals in our brain that affect mood, anxiety and anger and affects how we manage those things. I also think it can be helpful to be clear about what are our values are and priorities. Increase space each day to set a day's intention at the beginning or review at the end of the day. No matter how small, do something each day consistent with our values. Take time to reflect, problem solve and set goals. Connect. Sometimes it's just having a moment and sitting with someone.





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About Kids' Minds Matter

The goal of Kids' Minds Matter is to raise awareness about the need for pediatric mental and behavioral health care services and to raise the funds required to make these services available in the region through Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Lee Health. An estimated 46,000 Southwest Florida children are impacted by mental and behavioral health disorders like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, psychosis, substance abuse, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. As part of the region's strategic solution to the children's mental and behavioral health epidemic in Southwest Florida, Kids' Minds Matter is dedicated to fostering partnerships that support existing services, identifying and filling gaps in the continuum of care, and innovating new treatments.

Philanthropic support for Kids' Minds Matter has allowed Lee Health and Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida to: implement a tiered model of care that clinically aligns community, inpatient and outpatient care; hire additional psychiatrists, child advocates and other mental health professionals; offer Mental Health First Aid training to local pediatricians, emergency service providers and others who work directly with children; renovate an outpatient center in Fort Myers where a child's needs can be addressed in a therapeutic setting; and launch a first-of-its-kind Pediatric Digital Cognitive Behavioral Health diagnostic and treatment protocols interlaced with Tele-Psychology support to treat anxiety, depression and trauma. Most recently, Kids' Minds Matter introduced mental health care navigators into Lee and Collier County schools who will help families find resources and care to address their child's mental healthcare needs.

The "Mental Health Mondays" segments are a public forum, designed for open discussions that benefit a large audience, and to provide real-time resources and advice from pediatric mental health professionals and advocates. The information shared on this platform is intended for general public consumption and not intended for individual treatment. The views, advice, and resources shared by each guest speaker are solely their own and are not endorsed by Lee Health, Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Kids' Minds Matter. Kids' Minds Matter is dedicated to raising awareness and essential funding to enhance pediatric mental & behavioral health programs, services and access to care in Southwest Florida. To learn more about Kids' Minds Matter, visit KidsMindsMatter.com.

