

# NEWS FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

mental  
health  
awareness  
month



## IN THIS ISSUE

**Mental Health  
Awareness Month**

**How to recognize  
warning signs and  
support students in  
need**



## Talking about Mental Health

Below are some communication starter tips to help you begin the discussion about mental health.

1. Make uninterrupted time and space for you and your student(s) to talk.
2. Sit at the same level as your student and use language and examples that are age appropriate.
3. Listen actively: this practice involves asking for clarity when needed, and repeating what you have heard to ensure you heard what your student meant.
4. Observe your student's body language and ask about changes you have noticed.
5. Assure them that their feelings are valid and seek to find the source of what is causing those feelings.
6. Once your student has shared their feelings, encourage them to share more, and if necessary, seek support through a school social worker, counselor, or psychologist.

## Recognizing the Warning Signs

There are a multitude of different warning signs that can help identify mental health concerns in adults, young adults, older children, and younger children. These symptoms can vary as every person has a different way of showing warning signs for poor mental health. Listed below are some of the concerns reported from Mental Health America (2022) for warning signs. They are reported as follows:

### Young Children:

- Decline in school performance
- Poor grades despite strong efforts
- Constant worry or anxiety
- Repeated refusal to go to school or to take part in normal activities
- Hyperactivity or fidgeting
- Persistent nightmares
- Persistent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums or angry outbursts
- Depression, sadness or irritability
- Loss of interest in things previously liked

### Adults and Young Adults:

- Confused thinking
- Prolonged depression (sadness or irritability)
- Feelings of extreme highs and lows
- Excessive fears, worries and anxieties
- Social withdrawal
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Strong feelings of anger
- Strange thoughts (delusions)
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations)
- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments
- Substance use

### Pre-Adolescents and Older Children:

- Substance use
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Excessive complaints of physical ailments
- Changes in ability to manage responsibilities - at home and/or at school
- Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, and/or vandalism
- Intense fear
- Prolonged negative mood, often accompanied by poor appetite or thoughts of death
- Frequent outbursts of anger

## HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH



For more information on supporting your child's mental health, contact your child's teacher or school counselor. You can also visit our new Wellness Resources page at [fcusd.org/wellness](https://fcusd.org/wellness).



## Supporting Children's Mental Health at School

Teaching behavior is just as important as advocating for and supporting the mental health of students. There are many strategies educators can use to support the mental health of children.

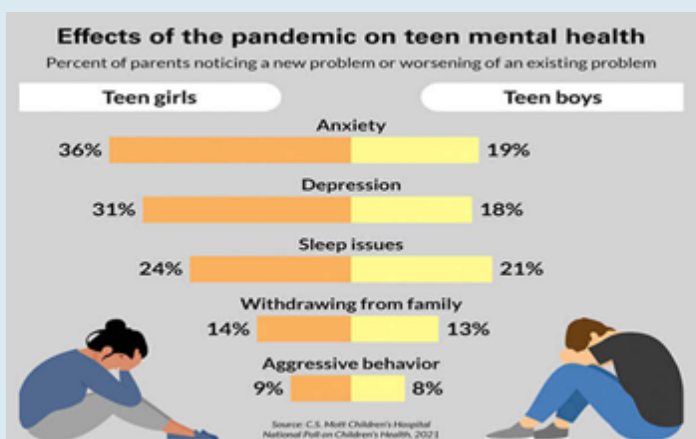
- Plan school-wide activities such as cross-grade events (ex. clubs, tutoring, and recess).
- Ensure the physical environment promotes a sense of learning (display student work, post school-wide expectations, etc.)
- Create classroom environments that increase student engagement, making sure that the instruction and activities match the students' skill levels. Differentiate instruction.
- Directly teach social and emotional skills.
- Provide resources to the students and parents on community resources that provide mental health support for children and families.
- Increase opportunities for family involvement (i.e. parent support groups, parenting skill development, opportunities for parents to volunteer, home visits, positive phone calls home).
- Identify persons within the building whom you can quickly access for support (school psychologist, school counselor, administrators, school nurse, school social worker, etc.).
- Provide breaks for individuals and the whole class. Ideas include playing a quick game, playing music, doing a deep breathing exercise, allowing students to draw or read, providing time for discussion and expression of feelings, journaling.
- When addressing students, speak in a calm tone, keeping responses brief.
- Offer students choices so that the student has the power to make their own behavioral choices.
- Offer the student a way to "save face" in situations when you are correcting behavior.
- Provide opportunities for success and reward for appropriate behavior.

## Supporting Children's Mental Health at Home

- Encourage open conversation about mental health. If you as a parent are initiating the conversation, take some time to prepare for the conversation. It is usually best to initiate these conversations when your child is in a more calm, neutral state, rather than immediately following a negative or crisis situation. If you're nervous about starting this conversation, Mental Health America has provided an excellent resource for families to start a conversation around mental health. If your child is the one to initiate the conversation, stay calm and really listen carefully to what your child is communicating to you. Take the conversation seriously. Understand that just initiating this conversation with you may be difficult for your child.
- Try to remain patient when talking to your child about different topics surrounding mental health. If you or your child get upset, it's okay to take a break and return to the conversation later, unless your child is in immediate danger.
- Validate your child's feelings and listen with empathy. Communicate your thoughts and feelings calmly and clearly. Ask clarifying questions to better understand your child. Try to talk about emotions, behaviors, and experiences in concrete, specific terms so that all parties are on the same page. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has a free coloring and activity book available to help young children talk about their emotions.
- Make sure you are not minimizing your child's experience or feelings. You may feel that your child's problems are small, or that they are making a big deal out of nothing. Remember that to your child, the problem is real and important.
- If your child asks for help with their mental health, explain to them that it is a sign of bravery and strength, not weakness. Because there is often a stigma associated with mental health needs, children can feel ashamed or embarrassed to admit when they are having difficulties. Help your child to see that mental health problems are not their fault. Explain to your child that mental health disorders are common and do not mean that something is "wrong" with them, just that their brain and mind may work differently.

## Supporting Children's Mental Health at Home Continued

- Tell your child that mental health challenges are not an unchangeable feature of their personality or their identity. Help your child identify their strengths so they don't see their mental health needs as the most important part of who they are as a person. ·
- Reassure your child that there is help available from mental health professionals, including staff at their school, and that you are available to facilitate that help. (Note: there are a myriad of mental health resources listed in the next section of this newsletter).
- Don't do all the talking. Let your child's voice be heard and let them ask questions. If you don't know the answer to a question, it's okay to let them know that you don't know, but that you will work with them to find the answer.
- Ask your child if they feel comfortable sharing their mental health needs with other members of the family. The more open the child's needs are, the less it feels like something to be ashamed of, and the less isolated the child may feel.
- Use some of the evidence-based resources available at The Child Minds Institute Health Minds Project to spark important conversations and teach your children a set of essential mental health skills.
- Discuss a plan for self-care and help your child identify effective coping skills. Jointly come up with some strategies that can help your child when they are facing challenges with their mental health. It would be helpful to include meaningful activities to do as a family. Remember, that as a parent of a child with mental health needs, your own self-care is important and should also be prioritized. Plus, by being a role-model for your personal self-care, you will help your child learn positive strategies to take care of their own mental health.
- Do your best to create a home that is low on stress, safe, and supportive. Give reasonable timelines and provide routines. Praise your child for the things they do well and highlight when they overcome challenges. Make time to tell them often that you love them.
- Help your child break down difficult thoughts and emotions. Take time to really talk about and understand how your child is feeling. Challenge negative or unrealistic thoughts by helping your child to consider other ways or explanations for the situation. Mental Health America has a great resource that details ways to help your child manage emotions.
- If your child shows signs of suicidal thoughts, intentions, or plans, don't be afraid to ask about suicide. Starting a conversation about suicide does not cause suicidal behavior. Rather, asking about suicide may be a relief. Reach out to your child's school and community care providers if you need assistance. Seek help immediately if your child is in immediate danger of harming themselves.



### Did you know?

Many teens may feel frustrated, anxious, and disconnected due to social distancing and missing usual social outlets as a result of the pandemic. Parents who have noted negative changes in their teens' mental health may need to try different strategies to help their teen, including relaxing COVID-19 rules and family rules on social media, keeping communication open while giving space, encouraging sleep hygiene, seeking professional help, and even using mental health apps. Parents play a critical role in helping their teens cope with the stress of the pandemic.



# It's Okay If You



Have a bad  
day



Make  
mistakes



Are less than  
perfect



Ask for personal  
space



Put yourself  
first



Take a break from  
everything

## Talking to Kids About Difficult News

Knowing how to guide difficult conversations can be difficult. These steps should help.

- **Think about what you want to say.** Plan and Practice
- **Find a quiet moment.**
- **Find out what they know.** Ask them “What have you heard about this?” And then listen. Listen. Listen.
- **Share your feelings with your child.** It is OK to acknowledge your feelings with your children. They see you are human. They also get a chance to see that even though upset, you can pull yourself together and continue on. Be a role model. This applies to emotions, too.
- **Tell the truth.** Lay out the facts at a level they can understand. You do not need to give graphic details. It is okay to say, “I don't know.”
- **Above all, reassure.** At the end of the conversation, reassure your children that you will do everything you know how to do to keep them safe and to watch out for them. Reassure them that you will be available to answer any questions or talk about this topic again in the future. Reassure them that you care for them.
- **Take care of yourself.**
- **Seek help.** Reach out to your counselors, social workers, psychologists etc. to assist you in addressing your student's fears and concerns.

## Crisis Help Lines

### Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call/Text: 988

Hours: 24/7

Website: [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

### Therapeutic Alternatives Inc Mobile Crisis Services

Call: 1-877-626-1772

Hours: 24/7

Website: [mytahome.com](https://mytahome.com)

### Sandhills Center

Call Center: 1-800-256-2452

Center Behavioral Crisis Line:

1-833-600-2054

Hours: 24/7

[sandhillscenter.org](https://sandhillscenter.org)

### NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

Call NC Helpline: 1-800-451-9682

Text NC Helpline: 1-919-999-6527

Hours: M-F, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm, ET

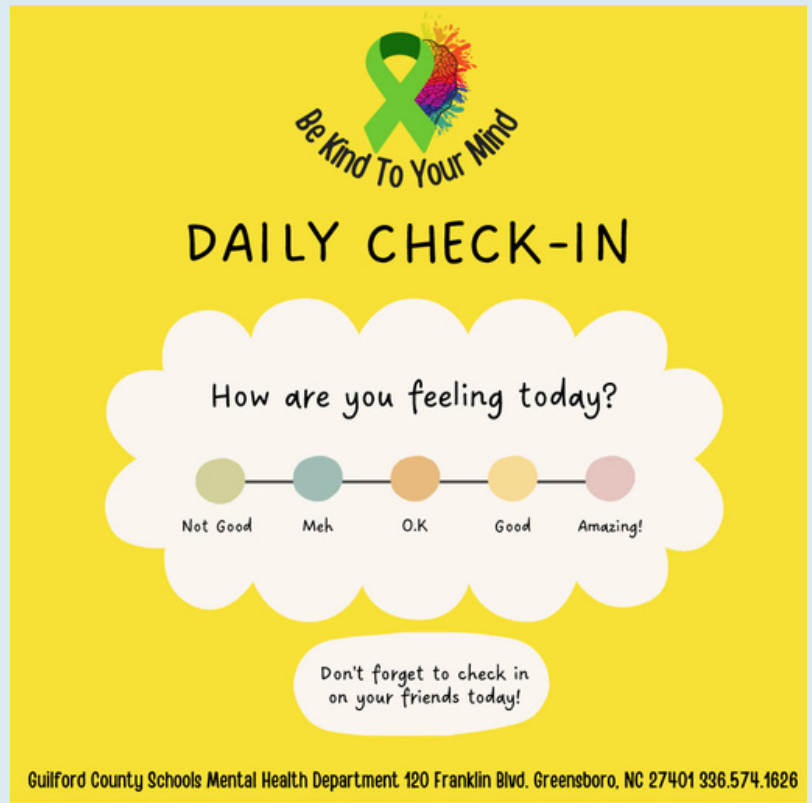
Crisis Text Line: “HOME” to 741741

Hours: 24/7



## Teen Substance Use and Mental Health

Adolescence is a time of physical, social and emotional development. Teen substance use changes the brain during this crucial developmental process. This puts youth at risk for mental health problems, difficulty learning, strained family relationships, engaging in other risky behaviors, legal issues, and addiction. Teens with mental health challenges sometimes use substances to self-medicate symptoms. This can sabotage mental health treatment and lead to even more problems. Addressing these issues can be life changing and sometimes lifesaving. Students, parents and teachers can find tools for substance use prevention and resources for finding help on the GCS Drug Free webpage.



## Mental Health Training for ALL GCS Staff

### Youth Mental Health First Aid

Teaches staff how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders in youth. This training gives adults who work with youth the skills they need to reach out and provide initial support to children and adolescents (ages 6-18) who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem and help connect them to the appropriate care.

### Trauma Informed Care

This program is designed to introduce the concepts and implementation of trauma-informed care. It involves thinking about trauma in different ways and altering approaches and strategies to provide opportunities for children to rebuild a sense of control, empowerment, and mastery in their environment to create successful learning. Participants will leave the session with a deeper awareness of the prevalence and impact of trauma as well as practical strategies for how to continually move toward being more trauma-informed.

Registration is Available in Performance Matters.

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### Sources:

[Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health | CDC](#)

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<https://healthblog.uofmhealth.org/childrens-health/national-poll-pandemic-negatively-impacted-teens-mental-health>

Paraphrased from: <https://www.apa.org/topics/journalism-facts/talking-children>



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