Supporting Positive Mental Health in Children

York Region

TOPICS

- Role of parents/caregivers
- Mental health and mental illness
- Stress and brain development
- Signs of stress and poor coping
- How to support positive mental health
- Where to go for help

ROLE OF THE PARENT

"…the environment of relationships young children experience with adult caregivers, as well as early nutrition and the physical, chemical and built environments,… influence lifelong learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health – for better or worse. Starting at birth and continuing throughout life, our ability to thrive is affected by our ongoing relationships and experiences and the degree to which they are healthy, supportive, and responsive or not."

(Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2018)

ROLE OF THE PARENT

Research shows a strong and responsive parent/caregiver-child relationship within a nurturing home environment can have a great impact on a child's development and overall well-being.

Parents/caregivers play a vital role in helping children build a solid foundation for mental health and coping skills before problems begin. When mental health problems arise, parents play a key role in assisting their child to get appropriate mental health supports.

MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL ILLNESS

MENTAL HEALTH

"…the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being."

Public Health Agency of Canada

MENTAL ILLNESS

"...comprise a broad range of problems, with different symptoms. However, they are generally characterized by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others."

World Health Organization (WHO)

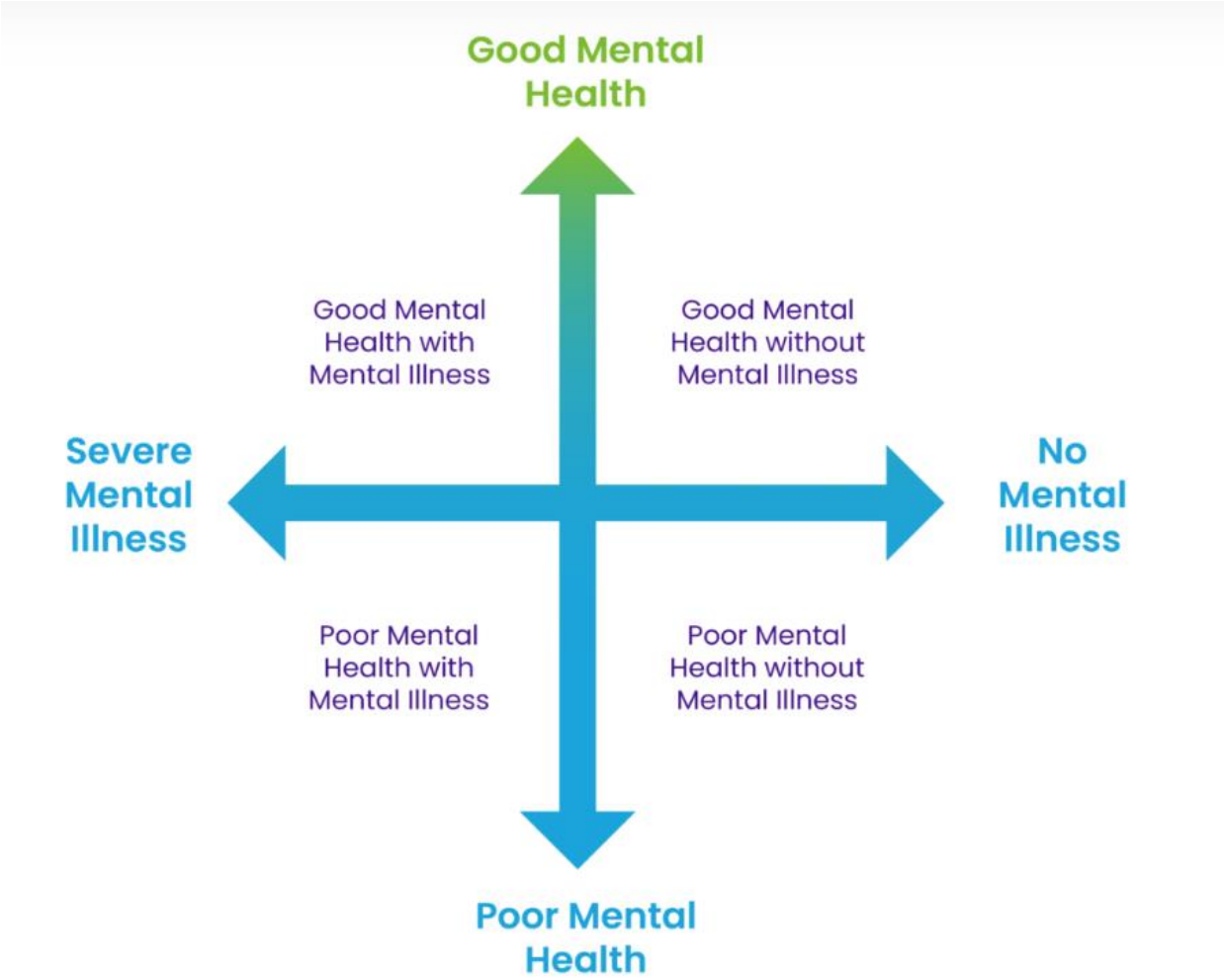
MENTAL HEALTH

- Mental health is a positive concept; it is more than the absence of mental illness
- It refers to "the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face; it is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being." (Public Health Agency of Canada definition cited in OPHS Mental Health Guideline, pg. 8)
- Good mental health allows you to bounce back when challenges come your way
- Just as good physical health is more than the absence of disease, good mental health is much more than the absence of mental illness

MENTAL ILLNESS

- Examples are schizophrenia, depression, intellectual disabilities and disorders due to drug abuse – most of these disorders can be successfully treated
- According to Children's Mental Health Ontario as many as 1 in 5 children and youth in Ontario will experience some form of mental health problem
- According to the 2017 *Ontario Mental Health and Physical Health Report* (OSDUHS):
    - 70 per cent of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence
    - About 31 per cent of students indicated they were experiencing psychological distress and did not know where to turn for help

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM



Source: School Mental Health Ontario

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

- Mental health and mental illness are two separate, but interconnected concepts, and can be thought of as a continuum where mental health status can change over time and events despite having or not having a mental illness

- A person can flourish or deteriorate depending on social well-being, mental health issues and life stresses/circumstances

- Ultimately, this means someone can be mentally healthy with or without a mental illness and poor mental health can be experienced by someone with or without a mental illness

MENTAL RESILIENCY

"…the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors."

(American Psychological Association)

STRESS

STRESS 101

- Is normal a part of our daily lives
- A bit of stress can be positive
- Stress can be toxic if:
  - it happens too often
  - it is too big
  - lack coping strategies or supports
- Too much stress can lead to health problems
- Our stress responses are not fixed - can be influenced by learning strategies
- **A consistent, caring adult can make all the difference!**

STRESS AND IMPACTS ON DEVELOPMENT

- Excessive stress can negatively affect learning and development
- Interferes with attention span, memory, focus, organization and decision making
- Chronic stress can damage brain cells and shrink main memory structures
- Harmful impacts on overall health & well-being (e.g., increased health problems and socialization problems)

SIGNS OF STRESS AND POOR COPING IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

TOO MUCH STRESS MAY LEAD TO…

Behaviours:

- Whining
- Poor listening
- Crying
- Nail biting
- Day dreaming
- Fighting with friends and family
- Being overly cautious
- Poor school performance
- Lack of appetite or eating more than usual

:

TOO MUCH STRESS MAY LEAD TO…

Feelings:

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Anger/frustration
- Sadness
- Overwhelmed
- Panic
- Being overly sensitive
- Irritability
- Helplessness/hopelessness
- Feeling threatened

TOO MUCH STRESS MAY LEAD TO…

Physical:

- Tense muscles
- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Rapid heartbeat
- Being cold
- Skin rash
- Shakiness
- Disturbed sleep
- Fatigue
- Frequently sick

TOO MUCH STRESS MAY LEAD TO…

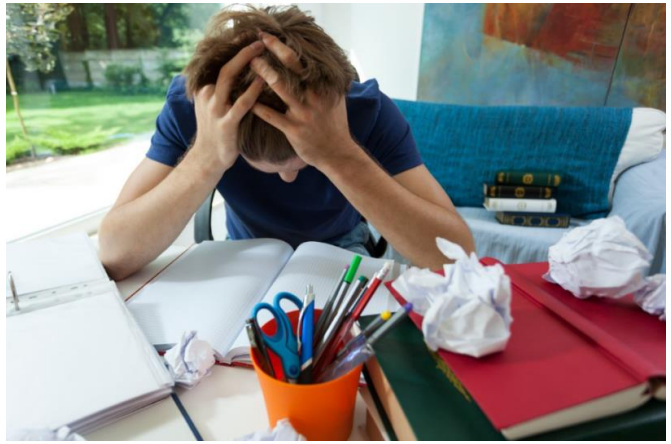
Mind:

- Poor concentration
- Whirling mind
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty problem-solving
- Being easily distracted
- Confusion
- Being irrational

:

CAUSES OF STRESS

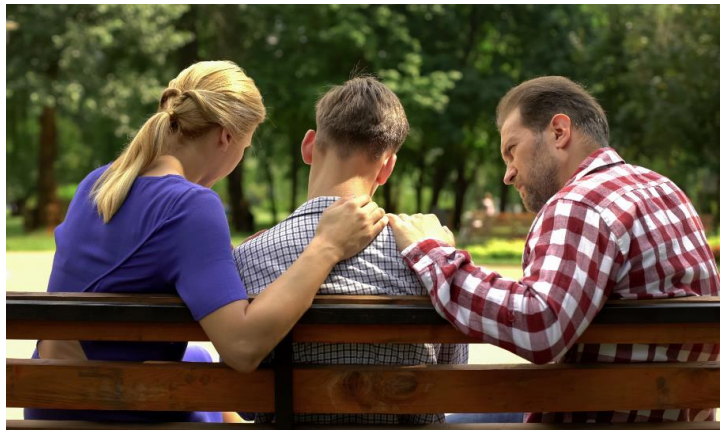
- School pressures such as assignments, tests, deadlines
- Big life changes such as moving to a new home or school
- Overload such as busy schedules, taking on too much, distractions
- Parents/Family
- Peers
- Worrying about physical appearances
- Not having as much money or material things as other kids
- Social media & technology



HOW TO SUPPORT POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCY

BUILD POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

- Spend time together – eat, laugh, activities
- Listen, listen, listen
- Be patient, understanding and non-judgmental
- Respect their voice and feelings
- Share stories of what's happening
- Show love and affection
- Ask how they are feeling and how you can help
- Remember to enjoy your kids at ALL stages



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Encourage children to move more and be active (60 mins/day)
- Be active as a family
- Promote unstructured and outdoor play
- Take part in York Region's *Pause to Play* Challenge (April) or any active community events
- Limit sedentary behaviors and reduce screen time (no more than 2 hours/day of recreational screen)

SCREEN TIME

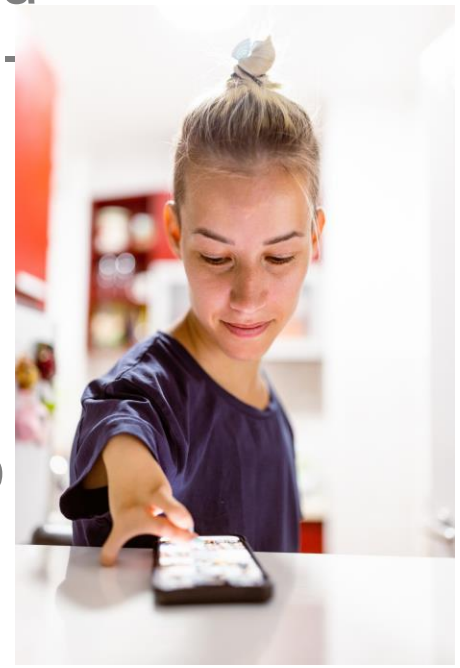
4 Essential ‘Ms”

1. Manage
2. Meaningful
3. Model
4. Monitor

Source:mCanadian Paediatric Society)

SCREEN TIME

1) **Manage Screen Use**
   - Make a family media plan/agreement, be present and engaged when screens are used, when possible, co-view and talk about content with children and teens
   - Discourage media multitasking, especially during homework
   - Learn about parental controls and privacy settings
   - Obtain your child's or teen's password and login info for devices and social media accounts, to monitor online safety
   - Speak proactively with children/teens about acceptable and unacceptable online behaviours



SCREEN TIME

2) Encourage Meaningful Screen Use

- Prioritize daily routines, such as interacting face-to-face, sleep and physical activity over screen use
- Prioritize screen activities that are educational, active or social over those that are passive or unsocial
- Help children/teens to choose developmentally appropriate content and to recognize problematic content or behaviours
- Be a part of your child's media lives (e.g., join in during video game play and ask about their experiences and encounters online)

.

SCREEN TIME

3) Model Healthy Screen Use

- Be a good role model with your own screen use—on *all* devices
- Turn off devices for family meals and socializing and encourage daily “screen free” times Choose healthy activities, like reading, outdoor play and crafts, over screen time
- Turn off screens when no one is using them, especially background TV.
- Avoid using screens for *at least* 1 hour before bedtime, and keep all screens out of your child’s bedroom as it interferes with sleep

SCREEN TIME

4) Monitor for signs of problematic screen use at any age, including the following:

- Complaints about being bored or unhappy without access to technology
- Oppositional behaviours in response to screen time limits
- Screen use that interferes with sleep, school or face-to-face interactions. Screen time that interferes with offline play, physical activities or socializing face-to-face
- Negative emotions following online interactions or video games or while texting

**Note, occasional occurrence of these signs may be expected, and does not necessarily indicate problematic screen use.*

HEALTHY EATING AND MENTAL HEALTH

https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/

- Follow Canada's Food Guide
- Eat a variety of foods each day – vegetables and fruit, protein and whole grains foods
- Make water your drink of choice
- Cook more often and with your child
- Be mindful of your eating habits
- Enjoy your food & eat meals with others
- Use food labels
- Beware of how food marketing can influence food choices
- Limit foods that are high in sodium, sugar or saturated fat

SLEEP AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Make sleep a priority
- Kids: 9 to 11 hours/day and youth: 8 to 10 hours/day
- Set regular bedtimes and morning routines
- Avoid screen time 1 hour before bedtime
- Have a relaxing bedtime routine
- Keep sleep environment dark, quiet and comfortable
- Physical activity = better sleep

SLEEP AND MENTAL HEALTH

What can you do as a parent?

- Set a clear expectation of a reasonable bedtime during weekdays and curfew on weekends
- Don’t make sleep an issue but talk to your teenagers about why sleep is important and encourage them to get enough
- Let them sleep in on weekends
- Have a “no cellphones in bed” policy; studies show a surprising number of teens send and receive text messages at times when they should be asleep

POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES

- Allow for downtime and quiet time
- Teach problem solving skills
- Encourage positive thinking
- Teach and model stress management skills
- Promote hobbies and interests
- Encourage your child to talk to someone they trust

WHAT ELSE YOU CAN DO TO HELP?

- Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
- Crisis Line: 1-855-310-COPE
- Connect with your Principal or teacher for support
- Seek professional mental health resources for your child (Ontario 211 or Kid's Help Phone Resources Around Me)

RESOURCES

- Canadian Mental Health Association (https://cmha.ca/)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (https://www.camh.ca/)
- Children's Mental Health Ontario (https://www.cmho.org/)
- Community Crisis Response Service (https://www.yssn.ca/310-COPE or **1-855-310-COPE**)
- Kids Help Phone (www.kidshelpphone.ca or **1-800-668-6868**)
- Psychology Foundation of Canada (www.psychologyfoundation.org)
- School Mental Health Ontario (https://smho-smso.ca/parents-and-families/)
- Sick Kids- The ABCs of Mental Health (https://www.sickkidscmh.ca/ABC/Parent-Resource/Welcome)
- Stress Strategies (www.StressStrategies.ca)
- YR Public Health's Healthy Schools Program (www.york.ca/healthyschools)

TAKING CARE OF YOU!

- Get enough sleep (7 to 8 hours/night)
- Prioritize your tasks
- Take care of your physical well-being
- Use your vacation time
- If you get sick, stay home!
- Plan and organize activities and meals ahead
- Set boundaries between work and non-work time
- Make time for “we time” with your kids or partner
- A little “me time”
- Develop a habit of gratitude
- Create a strong support system