

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

A guide for parents, families, and educators

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Mental Health is an important part of each and every one of us. Like physical health, mental health occurs on a spectrum and must be cared for. We all need to work towards understanding how to support ourselves and others in maintaining our mental health. Mental well-being is a state of feeling balanced- it allows us to cope effectively with stress and challenges. The more we maintain our mental health, the better we are able to interact with others and ourselves!

Safe at Home is excited to share this activity book to strengthen mental wellness across families, schools, and communities. Within this packet, you will find activities for all ages to begin your own exploration of mental health and caring for your emotional, psychological and social well-being.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH

Our emotional, psychological and social well-being that impacts how we think, feel, act and interact with others.

Understanding Mental Health: Media from Safe At Home

Safe Keeping Podcast

In this Safe Keeping episode, SAH staff discuss the importance of breaking the stigma around mental illness. Join Rachel and Gaby as they explore how understanding mental health can lead to an overall feeling of well-being and balance.



[Episode 8-Stop the Stigma: Mental Health](#)

For more from Safe Keeping visit
[Joetorre.org/podcast](https://joetorre.org/podcast)

Understand to Upstand

KNOW THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL DISTRESS

Understanding the impact of mental health symptoms and diagnoses is the first step on the journey to helping others. **Upstanders** actively take steps to safely provide support to those who need it!

CHANGES IN BEHAVIORS

Some noticeable behaviors can include changes in appetite or sleeping habits, risk-taking behaviors, difficulty committing to daily responsibilities, like work or school, and withdrawal from previous interests or relationships.



DIFFICULTY MANAGING EMOTIONS

Being quicker to anger or experiencing a sudden overwhelming sense of fear without a perceived cause, could indicate a mental health concern. Other changes in mood might include increased irritability, or periods of intense sadness or hyperactivity that interferes with daily living.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Sometimes, mental health concerns can present as physical symptoms because our mind and body are heavily linked. Some common symptoms that can indicate mental health concerns may include racing heart rate, fast breathing, frequent stomach aches or headaches. Physical symptoms should always be discussed with a medical doctor, just as mental health symptoms should be discussed with a clinician or other mental health provider.



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Understand to Upstand

KNOWING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL DISTRESS

Mental health is an important part of our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Just like physical health, mental health occurs on a spectrum. There can be many red flags that indicate that someone is experiencing a mental health concern. Knowing the signs can help you support them.

Mental health symptoms and concerns can be caused by someone's genetics, brain chemistry, traumatic events, or a combination of all three. Certain environments, like those with frequent arguing, violence, or lack of support, can make mental health symptoms worsen. Mental health symptoms are very common and are no one's fault. Remember that just like physical health, everyone has mental health and should care for it regularly!

One of the best ways for people with mental health symptoms or diagnoses to manage their condition is by having a strong support network. Offering your support and a listening ear can help them build resilience and avoid a serious crisis.

Visit joetorre.org/podcast and tune in to **Episode 8** (*Stop the Stigma: Mental Health*) of **Safe Keeping** for more information about breaking the stigma and talking about mental health.

Teaching to Trauma

Responding to Students' Needs in the Classroom

What is Trauma?

Trauma is a distressing or disturbing experience that causes a person to feel fear for their physical or emotional safety. Sometimes, trauma is a one-time experience. Other times, trauma can be a long-term ongoing experience, or multiple experiences of different instances of trauma; this is known as complex trauma. Responses to trauma can be lasting, long after the incident occurs, and can interfere with daily life.



How Does Trauma Impact Students in the Classroom?

Distractibility or Inattentiveness

Student may show difficulty focusing on tasks or be easily distracted in the classroom.

Difficulty Managing Emotions

Student may demonstrate emotional responses like tantrums, anger that seems an excessive, or seemingly unexplained crying,

Difficulty with Changes in Routine

Student may have difficulty with transitions or with unexpected changes in routine

Signs of Nervousness

Some students may show heightened vigilance, fidgeting, nail biting, or other signs of anxiety or nervousness

High Expectations of Self

Some students may appear as "perfectionists" or present with a seeming need to always excel.



What Can Teachers Do?

Notice signs and symptoms of trauma early and often. If you see a student struggling, do your best to be patient and offer support.

- Talk with a child about what helps them to calm down in moments of overwhelm, they know their emotions best.
- Help students prepare as early as possible for changes in the schedule.
- Ask for support from guidance counselors and other school staff.
- Create a judgment free and flexible environment
- Manage your own responses to trauma and difficulties by engaging in self-care



TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

With children and teens

WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW

Mental health is an important part of your child's emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Just like physical health, mental health occurs on a spectrum.

Check In & Create Safety



Make it a normal habit to "check in" on how everyone in your family is feeling, and how certain events — both good and bad — make them feel. Remind your child often that you are here to listen and support them — especially when they face challenges. This opens the door for more trust and comfort.

Offer Help

If your child is struggling, ask how you can help them and be ready to offer solutions if they are unsure. If your child is showing more severe symptoms of distress, such as suicidal thoughts, self-harm, consistent feelings of nervousness or hopelessness that interfere with their daily life, contact a mental health professional or crisis line for more support!



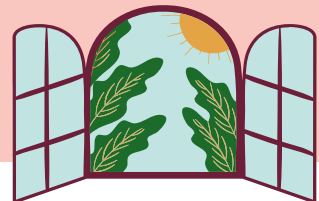
Stop the Stigma

Always assure your child that it is okay to struggle sometimes, and that there is no judgment from you if they need help. Normalizing care of mental health, the same way we care for our physical health, can make it easier to talk about. Have conversations about mental health often, even if your child is not struggling.



Be Open

Sharing your own feelings — including when you are sad or frustrated — helps children normalize this behavior and feel safer talking to you. It also helps to remind them that it is normal for people of all ages to face challenges.




For More Information

Visit joetorre.org/podcast and tune in to Episode 8 (Stop the Stigma: Mental Health) of **Safe Keeping** to learn more about breaking the stigma and talking about mental health.




LIFE AFTER COVID


As COVID-19 restrictions start to lift, many families are left wondering; *how do we adjust back to "normal" life?* Safe At Home encourages families to have open discussions about their needs, concerns, and hopes, as life post-COVID begins to feel like a reality - and as we navigate the long-term impact it had on our well-being.




WHO I CAN TALK TO



WHAT I'M NERVOUS ABOUT





WHAT I'M EXCITED FOR



HOW WE CAN STAY SAFE

WHAT WE EXPECT FROM EACH OTHER





(choose your own)



Trauma is a distressing or disturbing experience that causes a person to feel fear for their physical and/or emotional safety.

For many, COVID-19 was the first experience with a global pandemic that seriously changed their day-to-day life. COVID-19 created a sense of fear, sadness, uncertainty, grief, and nervousness.

As vaccines and an understanding of COVID-19 prevention increase, many people are beginning to feel a sense of normalcy returning. For some, the feelings around experiencing this global trauma may still remain - and it can take time to heal and move forward. If you or your child continues to experience feelings associated with trauma, you are not alone!

For more information, including resources and activities on coping with COVID-19, please visit [**joetorre.org/resources/**](https://joetorre.org/resources/)

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Supporting Children in Managing Tough Emotions

Supporting children in building resilience includes helping them overcome difficult moments or emotions that might feel "too big" to handle. These simple activities can help children learn to regulate their feelings, and can help adults practice building their own resiliency too!

BREATHE

Regulating breathing can help to calm the mind and body when feeling overwhelmed or frustrated.

Try This: Sit with your legs crossed on the floor. Breathe in slowly through your nose, pretend you are smelling a flower. Hold your breath for 3 seconds. Exhale slowly, pretend you are blowing out a candle.



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**SAFE AT
HOME.**

TAKE SPACE

Taking space allows you to reset and collect your thoughts and emotions before sharing with others.

Try This: Having a calming tool or fidget toy can help children focus nervous energy and relax. For instructions on how to create a family calming tool, click below to

[Visit our YouTube Channel](#)

it's okay to feel



your feelings

ENCOURAGE FEELINGS

Talking openly about feelings and using healthy communication leads to easier conflict resolution and understanding

Try This: Encourage your child to use to use feelings statements to express their emotions in the moment by following the phrase:

"I feel _____ because _____"

LISTEN ACTIVELY

Showing children you hear them and responding with empathy can support them in deescalating feelings of distress and help them feel heard and understood

Try This: After listening to your child express their feelings, repeat back to them what you heard in your own words. For example "I hear you are feeling disappointed that you didn't get to go to the park today, is that right?"



CELEBRATE THE POSITIVE

Reminding children that they are loved unconditionally allows them to be their full selves. Rewarding them with positive praise when they behave well, continues to encourage positive behavior.

Try This: Draw a picture as a family and include all the things you love about each other!

Thank You!

Thank you for your continued support of Safe At Home's mission to end the cycle of violence!
For more information about supporting mental health, creating space for self-care, and many more topics and activities, please visit
joetorre.org/resources

