

Talking About Mental Health

A Practical Guide for Parents

Mental health is about how we think, feel, and cope with everyday life. Just like physical health, it changes over time. Good mental health doesn't mean being happy all the time — it means having the tools and support to manage stress, bounce back from challenges, and enjoy positive connections.

How to have safe conversations

Create a Safe Space

- Choose calm moments (car rides, walks, cooking together).
- Put phones down and show you're present.
- Keep it private — your teen will share more when they feel safe.

Conversation starters – Use gentle openers:

- "You seem a bit quiet today, want to talk?"
- "What was a high and low from your day?"
- "I've had a stressful day, how about you?"

Lots of small chats are better than one big talk.

Listen First

- Stay calm — your reaction sets the tone.
- Use silence, nods, and "That sounds tough" instead of rushing to fix.
- Reflect feelings: "It seems like you're frustrated about school."

Keep it Positive

- Focus on their strengths: "I love how you keep trying even when things are tough."
- Remind them they're not alone — "We can work on this together."
- Celebrate small wins — like talking about feelings or asking for help.

Respect Their Space

- If they don't want to talk: "That's okay, I'm here when you're ready."
- Try again later — sometimes conversations land better on a walk, drive, or at bedtime.

Balance Openness and Boundaries

- Respect privacy, but if safety is at risk (self-harm, suicidal thoughts), step in and seek help immediately.
- Show that asking for help is a strength, not weakness.



When to Seek Extra Help

- If distress lasts more than 2 weeks.
- If your teen talks about hopelessness, suicide, or self-harm.
- If they stop seeing friends, drop hobbies, or their sleep/appetite changes a lot.
- Changes in appetite, energy, or mood

Your role is to notice, listen, and connect them to help. Every conversation matters.

Everyday Actions to Support Mental Health

Building good mental health doesn't always come from big changes — it's the little daily habits that add up. Some simple actions that help include:

- **Share Meals (Device-Free):** Sit down together at breakfast or dinner without phones or TV. Eating together builds connection and gives a chance to talk naturally.
- **Move Your Body:** Go for a walk, bike ride, play sport, dance to music, or stretch. Even 20 minutes a day can lift mood and reduce stress.
- **Do Fun Things Together:** Play cards, cook a new recipe, try a board game, or listen to music together. Fun helps balance out the stress of school or friends.
- **Get Outside:** Spend time in the sun and fresh air — shoot hoops in the driveway, walk the dog, or do homework in the backyard. Nature boosts mental health.
- **Sleep Routine:** Aim for consistent bedtimes and wind-down rituals (dim lights, no screens before bed). Sleep is one of the strongest protectors of mental health.
- **Practice Coping Skills:** Show teens that it's normal to take a break when overwhelmed. For example: "I'm going to listen to music for 10 minutes to calm down."
- **Limit Overload:** Encourage balance — one activity or commitment at a time instead of feeling pressured to do everything.

Self care - you are important too

- **Practice Self-Care:** Engage in activities that rejuvenate you.
- **Seek Support:** Talk to friends, family, or support groups, Parent lines
- **Set Realistic Expectations:** Understand that progress takes time.
- **Educate Yourself:** Learn about mental health to better support your child.

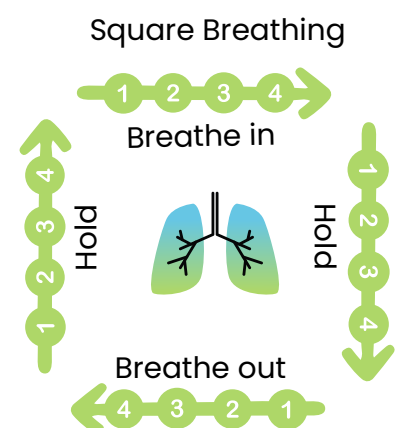
Co Regulation

- Put your oxygen mask on first – step outside if you need a break
- Practice calming tools when calm
- Create connection – listen without judgement, validate feelings
- Explore behaviour – this can be a form of communication



Calming tools

- Movement – walk, dance
- Calm box of sensory items
- Colour in together
- Drink cold water
- Listen to music
- Draw emotion or worry
- Mindfulness
- Cuddle a pet, soft toy



Need support?

You're not alone—support is available as you walk this journey with your child. Let's raise emotionally healthy, socially connected, and resilient young people.

- **Raising Children Network – raisingchildren.net.au**
- **Parentline NSW – 1300 1300 52**
- **CatholicCare Wollongong – catholiccare.dow.org.au**
- **Reach out to your GP, school counsellor, or services like Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).**