



Supporting Parents  
Supporting Children



Supporting your child's positive  
mental health & wellbeing

# What is mental health?

Mental health is “a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” (World Health Organisation, 2014).

Every parent tries to support their children’s mental health and wellbeing by talking, listening and balancing normal everyday family life and activities. Having good mental health does not mean your child won’t experience difficulties and worries; feeling worried, sad or fearful is perfectly normal. Being able to bounce back from difficult times means your child will be better able to handle the many challenges that might come their way in their lives – this is what we call being resilient. Resilience helps your child to manage their emotions more effectively and to cope with some of life’s difficulties.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WELLBEING?

WELLBEING = FEELING GOOD + FUNCTIONING WELL

Having overall feelings of happiness, contentment and enjoyment are signs of someone who has a positive experience of their life. There can be other times in life though, when we find that our experiences are both challenging and stressful. Generally being able to cope and function well during life’s ups and downs is what we refer to as **wellbeing**.

## WHAT INFLUENCES MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING?

There are many things that influence our mental health and wellbeing some of which are shown in the diagram.

Having an understanding of the things that can influence your child’s mental health and wellbeing can equip you with the tools necessary to support your child. There are simple steps you can take to promote your child’s mental health and wellbeing.



# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROMOTE YOUR CHILD'S POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING?



## TALK ABOUT FEELINGS WITH YOUR CHILD

Talking about feelings with your child is an important way of recognising, accepting and acknowledging how your child is feeling. This can help your child begin to understand how and why they are feeling a particular way and it can also help them to be able to manage those feelings for themselves. Talking about feelings with your young child can also teach your child words to describe how they are feeling.

Children react to situations with a variety of feelings and in very different ways.

It is helpful to acknowledge with your child that they cannot choose their feelings but they can choose what they do with them.

## LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD

As parents, it is important that your child knows you are listening to them, you care about what is happening in their lives and how they are feeling. When you try to listen to and understand your child you get a more complete message, this is referred to as: 'Actively Listening'. When you actively listen, you support your child's positive mental health and wellbeing. Children sometimes find it easier to talk to their parents when they are doing an activity and not looking at them face to face, for example in the car, when watching TV or helping load the dishwasher. This can take the pressure off the conversation you have with your child. The conversation can be less intense and more comfortable for your child to talk to you.



### Active listening is important because it:

- Develops your relationship with your child
- Shows your child that their view is important and encourages them to share more
- Gives you a greater understanding of your child's point of view
- Demonstrates important skills for your child
- Creates a solid foundation for problem solving and decision making

### How can we actively listen to our children?

PAY ATTENTION

DON'T INTERRUPT

DON'T JUDGE

PROVIDE FEEDBACK

KEEP PRACTICING

- DO:**
- Give time and attention to your child
  - Encourage them to tell you about their day
  - Acknowledge your child, what they are doing and how they are feeling
  - Give your child time and space to process their feelings
  - Help your child to understand and work things out for themselves

- DON'T:**
- Shame or tease your child about their feelings ("Why are you getting upset – it's only a film")
  - Disapprove of what your child is feeling – as it won't stop them from having those feelings but may force them to hide them from you
  - Reject your child's choices without helping them to explore their options

## FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

By trying to incorporate the following five ways to wellbeing into our own lives and into the lives of our children on a daily basis, we can ensure that we are promoting mental health and wellbeing consistently across our children's lives.



### 1. Connect

Encouraging and supporting your child to mix with other children in different situations can promote their mental health and wellbeing. Children need freedom to make friends, to build relationships, to make mistakes and to learn from them. At home, having open conversations, discussions and debates between family members can add to your child's social abilities and support mental health and wellbeing.

### 2. Be Active

Physical activity not only helps your body feel better, but it is also good for your mind as well. By going for walks with your child or playing outdoors you can be a good role model and show them that exercise can make you feel good too! There are other physical health needs that children also have including warmth, regular nutritious meals, adequate sleep and shelter. Meeting these physical health needs for and with your child will positively impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

### 3. Keep Learning

Encourage your child to try new things. Learning new things about the world around them helps your child feel more confident and able, as well as it being fun! Trying new experiences with your child shows them that learning is important not only in their own life, but in yours also. If your child asks you a question that you do not know the answer to, you could be honest and tell them you don't know and encourage them to help you find the answer.

### 4. Give

Helping, sharing, giving and working with others can help your child to feel an increased sense of self-worth and experience positive feelings. This helps children feel that they belong, have a role to play and are important. Create opportunities for your child to get involved, take responsibility for things, help and share in a range of different ways in the home, school and community. For example, you could set jobs for your child, inside and outside the home or ask them to help out a neighbour.

### 5. Take Notice

Encourage your child to be aware of the world around them and how it makes them feel. Encourage your child to be curious, question what they don't know or understand and see the wonder in new things. By noticing and pointing out the positives in your child and their environment, like the unique talents he/she has and the beautiful things in nature, you can help your child have a positive outlook in their life and to be grateful for it. This adds to your child's positive mental health and wellbeing.

## MEETING YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

When you meet your child's normal everyday needs, you are also promoting their positive mental health and wellbeing. Loving children unconditionally helps them to grow up feeling confident and good about themselves. Children need to have routines throughout their day. They also need their parents to set boundaries for and with them. As your child gets older, it's important that you and your child agree rules and consequences together. Children find it easier to accept rules and consequences when they have had an input into making them. By giving your child time, attention, support and respect, you can help them to be healthy. The physical environment your child grows up in is also important; children need to feel safe and secure where they can be sure that their care needs are being met, with regular routines, rules and boundaries set by consistent responsible adult/s.

## PARENTS WORKING TOGETHER FOR THEIR CHILDREN IS IMPORTANT

All families are different and have many different make-ups and arrangements. We are all influenced by our own experiences of being parented and we develop our own unique parenting style.

It is important for children that the different adults in their lives have similar expectations. When a child hears mixed messages from the adults that care for them, they can become confused or conflicted and may be drawn more to one adult than another.

Parents working together should:

- **Agree** – boundaries, rules and consequences together and with your child
- **Negotiate** – talk, communicate, compromise, find the middle ground when making decisions as parents and with your child
- **Support** – don't disagree with each other in front of your child.
- **Remain consistent** – stick to what you agreed as a team. If you feel weak, seek support or allow the stronger parent to manage the situation
- **Agree on key values** – unite as parents on the things that matter for your own family.

Working together as parents can help you ensure that you are creating an environment for your child that is stable and reassuring. Sometimes parenting alone can be very challenging. If you're parenting alone and you are finding it tough, you might consider looking for support and help from extended family, friends and others in the community.



**What is important is that adults show that they are parenting as a team, so that there is consistency and stability in their child's home life.**



## SELF-CARE FOR PARENTS

Parenting is perhaps the most important role that adults undertake and sometimes you can feel anxious about it. Much of your anxiety can come from wanting to do it right for your child.

It is important that you look after your own mental health and wellbeing so that you can support your child when he/she needs it.

All of the information in this leaflet, about supporting positive mental health and wellbeing, is as relevant for you as it is for your child. By looking after your own mental health and wellbeing, you can act as a positive role model for your child.

## WHAT IF I AM WORRIED ABOUT MY CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING?

As a parent, you can sometimes worry about your child. When this happens, you should keep doing what you know will support your child like: active listening, putting into practice the '5 ways to wellbeing', working together as parents and self-caring for yourself. At different times, many children go through stages of feeling afraid, anxious or angry, but with their parents and others support, they may be able to manage their own mental health and wellbeing and live their lives feeling good and functioning well.

If you are still worried about your child, it may be time to share and discuss this with your GP.

You can also contact St. Patrick's Mental Health Services and the NPC Helpline using the contact details below:

**St Patrick's**  
Mental Health Services



St. Patrick's Mental Health Services Support  
and Information line: 01 2493333  
Email: [info@stpatmail.com](mailto:info@stpatmail.com) [www.stpatricks.ie](http://www.stpatricks.ie)



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