

Youth Mental Health – Encouraging Well-being in the Y’s Youth Activities

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Use this handout along with the video for the YMCA on youth mental health.

Mental Health

What is mental health? Mental health is the ability to employ coping skills and experience well-being while navigating life’s changes and challenges.

“Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act, and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.” *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*

The Statistics

20% of youth and adults experience a mental health challenge any given year.

It’s important to recognize that two out of 10 children are facing a mental health challenge.

The Influences on Mental Health

- Family
- Environment
- Development
- Biology

The Impact

What is mental illness? “Mental illnesses are disorders, ranging from mild to severe, that affect a person’s thinking, mood, and/or behavior.” *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*

Intensity and **duration** of symptoms determine whether we are experiencing a stressor or a mental illness.

Mental health is a health issue. Mental health and physical health are interrelated.

The Support

How to support mental health:

- Recognize – understand that mental health has an impact on the behavior of youth.
- Respect – be sensitive to the needs of youth, engaging all youth in activities encouraging their success.
- Refer – see yourself as a part of the network of support in the lives of youth.
 - Always report suicidal ideation and thoughts.
 - Talking about suicide does not give people the idea – we must engage support any time there is a concern for safety.

What is good for youth who are struggling, is good for all youth.

The Goals

A safe environment in which each child is respected and encouraged and supported.

Activities and interactions that encourage well-being in:

- Mind
 - New experiences
 - Challenges
 - Opportunities to problem-solve to build resilience
 - Goals to achieve
- Body
 - Exercise
 - Activities outside (with no screens!)
- Spirit
 - Meaning
 - Finding purpose

The Tips

How to encourage social and emotional well-being:

- Listen – listen for feelings.
- Validate
 - Point out pride expressed by the child in her or his accomplishments.
 - Emphasize we all have feelings of sadness or worry.
- Be an example
 - Show how to handle frustrations constructively.
 - Model how to problem-solve.
- Engage
 - Ensure everyone has a role in activities, drills in practice, and games.
 - Be in tune and connect with youth and their families.
- Encourage
 - Affirm effort even more than achievement.
 - Attribute positive qualities to children – affirm a child’s kindness, humor, care for others, or positive attitude.

You give support.

**You have a responsibility to understand the role mental health plays
in the lives of youth and their families.**

You make an impact by encouraging well-being.

Be sure to take care of YOU!

The Center’s 40+ therapists and psychologists provide counseling and psychological services that can help children, teens, and adults gain insight, learn, and grow through life’s changes and challenges.

15 office locations across North and Central Texas, from McKinney to Waco and Garland to Arlington.