

How can parents promote student well-being?

According to recent data from Ontario, over one-third of students in grades 7-12 report experiencing moderate-to-serious levels of psychological distress, with rates increasing across grades. Despite this, about one-third of students (39%) report that they rarely or never talk to their parents about their problems or feelings. This isn't surprising as adolescence is often marked by a shift, with youth turning to friends for support rather than parents. Still, parents are the cornerstone in supporting their child's well-being.

HERE ARE FIVE STRATEGIES THAT PARENTS CAN USE TO SUPPORT THE WELL-BEING OF THEIR MIDDLE-AND HIGH-SCHOOL CHILDREN:

<p>1. Listen and empathize</p>	<p>Parents often want to provide advice to their kids or fix their challenging feelings. It's important that parents really listen to what their teens have to say, try to understand their perspective, and validate their feelings. Parents can recognize how their child is feeling without reinforcing unhealthy or unhelpful behaviours. For example, rather than dismissing disappointment (e.g. "You don't need to get upset about not having your phone"), parents can validate and acknowledge these feelings (e.g. "I know you're disappointed that you can't have your phone right now").</p>
<p>2. Find time for positive communication</p>	<p>Kids and parents have busy lives, which often means they are limited in the amount of quality time they spend together. Finding time for positive connections and interactions (e.g. family meals or time in the car) is critical to supporting well-being. Focus on positive communication and feedback during these times and avoid criticism, which can have negative impacts on self-esteem and mood.</p>
<p>3. Parental monitoring</p>	<p>This means parents knowing where their children are and getting to know their friends, which has been found to protect against a variety of risk behaviours (e.g. alcohol and other drug use).</p>
<p>4. Set limits</p>	<p>An authoritative parenting style has been found to best support healthy development. This means parenting that involves both high demands (i.e. setting limits on their child's behaviours) and high responsiveness (i.e. warm and sensitive to their child's needs). It's important that parents explain their reasons for enforcing boundaries rather than using punishment (i.e. "do it...or else") or power (i.e. "because I said so").</p>
<p>5. Role model healthy coping</p>	<p>From an early age, kids learn how to take care of their mental health and well-being by watching their parents. The best way for parents to teach kids and teens how to manage stress, cope with setbacks, and engage in self-care is for parents to do these things themselves.</p>

Research shows that the quality of a parent-child relationship can have a significant impact – positive or negative – on their child's mental health and well-being. While middle- and high-school children tend to seek support from their peer groups, it's important for parents to continue supporting and promoting the well-being of their child by setting healthy boundaries, modeling healthy coping strategies, and having open conversations that acknowledge and validate their child's feelings.

For online resources and references please visit:
www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education

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