

The Purpose for this Brochure

We are all living in an unprecedented time right now. Managing mental health for everyone, adults and kids alike, can be difficult no matter what, but it's especially difficult during times of high stress and uncertainty. We hope that this brochure can give parents, kids, and teens practical tips for managing mental health during this stressful time.

Warning Signs

First, let's go over some warning signs to observe that should alert you to pay attention to you or your child's mental health. It's always important to take care of your mental health, but pay special attention if you notice any of the following symptoms/behaviors:

- Increased isolation (for example, if your teens shuts himself in his room and doesn't want to come out more than usual)
- More frequent and/or severe outbursts or "tantrums"
- No longer finding pleasure in activities you once enjoyed
- Any suicidal talk, such as "what's the point of life" or "I just want it all to end."
- Sudden changes in sleeping or eating habits.
- Physical symptoms with no obvious explanations, such as headaches, stomachaches, or muscle pain.

Mental Health First Aid for Kids, Teens, and Parents



The Abbe
Community Mental
Health Center in
Iowa City

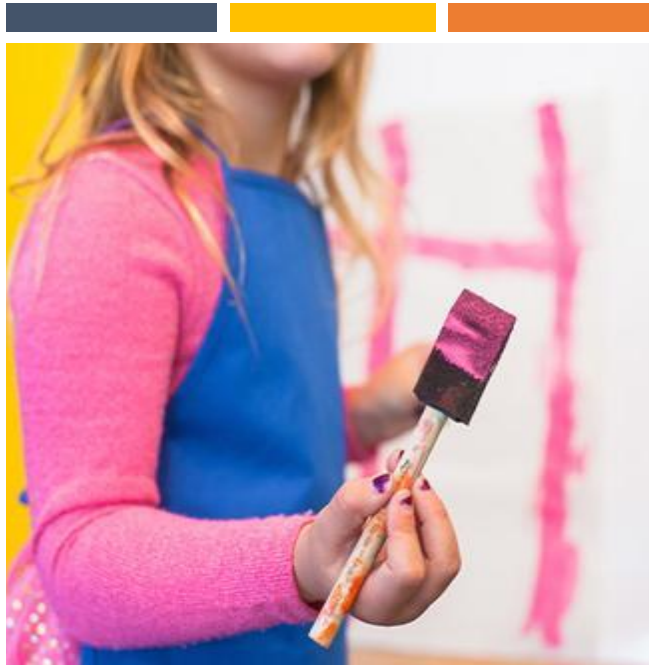


Tips for Kids

- Teach them how to “belly breathe:” Put your hand on your stomach and breathe slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth, noticing your belly move up and down as you breathe in and out. The “Elmo Belly Breathe” video on YouTube is a great instructional video for kids
- Have your kids identify a special item they can taste, smell, or touch. For example, gum for taste, a special lotion for smell, or a fuzzy blanket for touch. Instruct them to use the special item and really focus on the taste, smell, or touch when they start to feel upset.
- Help them identify their triggers. Ask them how they feel when they’re in the “green, yellow, or red zone” and encourage them to use their special object and take deep belly breaths when they’re in the “yellow zone,” before it gets to red.

Tips for Parents

- Ask your kids and teens open ended questions about how they’re feeling, such as “what is the worst part about all of this for you?” Listen to their concerns without judgement and use reflective listening statements like “that sounds really hard” or “I’m hearing you feel frustrated that you aren’t able to see your friends.”
- Try to find a flexible schedule your family can adapt to. There are lots of great ideas online for this. Kids thrive on routine, so try to find as much predictability in the day as possible.



“It may be stormy now, but it never rains forever.”

Tips for Teens

- Teach older kids and teens the following grounding exercise to help them calm down when feeling anxious: identify 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste. Focus on the details of these senses, such as noticing the pattern on a wooden table or hearing background instruments in a song.
- Find creative ways to encourage teens to exercise. Have dance parties, go on nature hikes, or look up exercise videos on YouTube that you could do together.
- Help them find a creative outlet they can enjoy, like playing music, writing poetry or short stories, painting, or coloring adult coloring books.
- Teach them positive self-talk: “it’s going to be ok,” “I’m a strong person,” etc.