



EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

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DEER OAKS PRESENTS

May On-Demand Seminar

Are You a Good Listener?

*Available OnDemand starting May 16th
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PRACTICING LISTENING SKILLS

Listening is an art, a skill, and a discipline. Like other skills, it requires self-control. You must understand what is involved in listening and develop the necessary techniques to be silent and listen. You must ignore your own needs and focus attention on the person speaking. Hearing becomes listening only when you pay attention to what is said and follow it very closely.

Ways You Demonstrate That You Are Listening

- Your body language
- Making eye contact
- Keeping your body open
- Echoing words
- Nods of your head
- Leaning toward the speaker

You Listen in Order to...

- Show your support and help the other person(s) relax.
- Show you are accepting them and are open to them.
- Enable each one to speak and be heard.
- Be able to ask questions to clarify.
- Check assumptions.
- Clear up misperceptions.
- Restate or paraphrase.
- Find the key points or issues.
- Provide the silence necessary to encourage speech.
- Know when to bring to closure and when to test for agreements.

You need to show that you are listening carefully. This is called attending. Attending skills build rapport and help people feel at ease.

- Listen without interrupting.
- Pay attention.
- Use supportive body language.
- Paraphrase facts and feelings.

You also need to practice reacting and responding in positive ways. Using good responding skills helps people understand the things you care about. It also helps you collect information about the situation.

- Ask clarifying questions.
- Ask probing questions.



- Restate what the other person is saying, catching the essence but trying to take out the volatile phrases or language. This is called laundering language, and it can reduce friction.
- Summarize facts and feelings.
- Reframe issues. Focus on the interests, not positions.
- Try to always use "I" language instead of "you" language. For example, don't say, "When you do that, you make me feel..." Instead you can say, "When you do that I feel..."
- Try to communicate directly with the other person.
- Be forward thinking. Try to focus on the future.

Use brainstorming to find as many options or solutions as possible. The ground rules to brainstorming are that the people in the meeting are just throwing out ideas. At this point in the process, do not eliminate any ideas. The other ground rule is that mere mention of an idea does not mean that either person is agreeing to that idea. It's just an idea thrown out for purposes of the brainstorming session. Brainstorming helps

turn good ideas into a plan of action. Look for points of agreement that the persons have in common and mention them.

You listen by paying attention.

Paying attention and listening without interruption allows the other person to "let off steam." Before any serious resolutions can occur, you need to let the other person know that you understand where they are coming from and you understand that they feel strongly about the issues you are discussing with them. Their intense emotions must be acknowledged and affirmed before serious solutions can be discussed. You should encourage the other person to let off steam and explain their concerns by using verbal cues such as these:

- "I see."
- "I understand."
- "That's a good point."
- "I can see that you feel strongly about that."
- "I can understand how you could see it like that."

These nonverbal actions also show the other person that you hear what they are saying:

- Squarely face the other person.
- Adopt an open posture.
- Lean discreetly, not threateningly, toward the other person.
- Maintain eye contact. Take cues from the other person as to the extent of eye contact with which he or she is comfortable.
- Try to relax as you interact with the other person.

Of course, for the other person to know that you are listening, you must make a response. The effectiveness of your listening will be determined by the style and quality of your response.

Source: U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, *Alternative Dispute Resolution*. (Updated 2015, August 15). *Practicing listening skills*. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <http://www.va.gov>



Resolving Conflict Constructively and Respectfully

Conflict is a natural part of life brought on by our different beliefs, experiences, and values. If not managed carefully, however, conflict can harm relationships. Help with handling discord at minor levels may help to lessen greater risks such as divorce, and violence.

Here are some steps that may be used to resolve conflicts, and some specific guidelines for helping children learn to solve problems on their own. The most important thing to remember is that practice makes perfect. Use and re-use these skills to improve interpersonal skills over a lifetime. If conflict continues to escalate, seek professional help.

1. Define the conflict and confront it.

- Describe the conflict in clear, concrete terms. Be specific when answering the who, what, when, where, and why questions.
- Describe behaviors, feelings, consequences, and desired changes. Be specific and start sentences with I, not you.
- Focus on behaviors or problems, not people.
- Define the conflict as a problem for both of you to solve together, not a battle to be won.

2. Brainstorm alternative solutions.

- Take turns offering alternative solutions. List them all.
- Be nonjudgmental of others' ideas.

3. Explore advantages and disadvantages of possible solutions.

- Examine the consequences of each solution.
- Think and talk positively.

4. Agree on the most workable solution.

- Agree to a solution you both understand and can live with.
- Work to find a win-win solution.

5. Use the solution.

- Be committed to resolving the conflict.
- Follow through with the actions agreed upon.

6. Evaluate after time.

Work out a way to check on how well the solution is working. Adjust the resolution when necessary.

When using the above steps, remember to also incorporate the following skills into your problem solving:

- **Treat the other person with respect.** Find a time and place to discuss the conflict with the other person. Choose a time when you aren't arguing or angry. The place should be comfortable for both of you—away from either party's turf. Although respecting the other person during a conflict is challenging, you'll be more successful when you do so. Words of disrespect block communication and may create wounds that may never heal. Use your will power to treat the other person as a person of worth and as an equal.



- **Communicate understanding.** Listen to really understand the other person's feelings, needs, and so forth. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Step back and try to imagine how the other person sees things. By focusing on the golden rule and treating others as we would like to be treated, many conflicts can be resolved in less time with happier, healthier results.

Sources

Davidson, J., & Wood, C. (2004). *A Conflict Resolution Model. Theory into Practice, 43*(1), 6-13. doi:10.1353/tip.2004.0005.

Spires, C. (n.d.). *Resolving conflict constructively and respectfully (HYG-5196)*. Retrieved October 14, 2020, from Ohio State University Extension, Family and Consumer Sciences: <https://ohioline.osu.edu>

THE EFFECTS OF CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH ON PARENTS

Parenting can bring oodles of joy, and yet it can be one of the most challenging experiences you may go through. Parenting at any time is hard, but add the recent pandemic, the economic downturn, the constant uncertainties surrounding you—and the challenge reaches a whole new level. This is especially so for parents of children with mental health concerns. While a lot of ground has been covered on the impact of parental mental health on children, much is to be said about the impact of a child's mental health on parents. This article hopes to provide tools and helpful information for parents caring for a child with mental health issues.

Most parents dream of raising happy, healthy, and carefree children. So, when you start to notice concerns about your child's mental health, it can lead to a lot of conflicting and unpleasant feelings. In the initial stages, you may question your observations, dismiss them, or go back and forth between accepting and denying the presence of concerning behaviors. If the concerns are brought to your notice by teachers or other individuals involved in your child's life, you may feel that your child is being misunderstood. It can be hard to even acknowledge such feedback. Naturally, a lot of parents instinctively react with "How come I do not see that behavior at home?" or "You don't know my child."

At other times, you may recognize that your child is struggling in some ways and is needing support, but you may not know how to find help. In many places, parents find it difficult to access timely care for their children. Long wait times for mental health support can cause significant distress and frustration, as you may



worry about your child's mental health. For others, financial concerns may be an issue, if the child's school or insurance does not offer benefits in this regard.

Stress and worry about a child's wellbeing have a significant impact on the parent's mental wellbeing as well. The child's mental wellbeing not only impacts their own ability to engage in various activities, but it also impacts their parent's involvement in professional and social engagements. As a parent, you may find it difficult to concentrate on your work and engage in self-care as you balance work responsibilities in addition to caring for a child's mental wellbeing. You may need to take time off to support your child. A survey conducted in 2022 identified that as many as 40 percent of parents had stated that they were worried about their kids' mental health.¹ These numbers are a small reflection of the extent to which a child's mental health struggles impact the family and caregivers.

It can become overwhelming when a parent must learn about their child's mental health concerns, identify the resources the child may

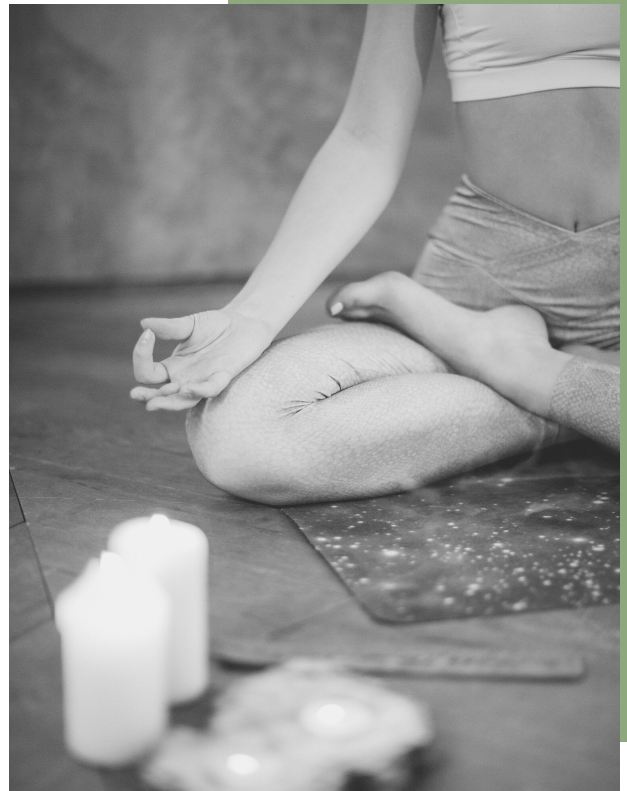
need, and advocate for the child to get the needed support. In addition to that, they must fulfill their own responsibilities and battle the worries and fears about the possible stigma. Parents often find themselves struggling as well. If you relate to this, know that you are not alone. Below are some things you can do.

Manage your own emotions about your child's struggles.

If your child has symptoms related to a mental health issue, it is crucial to first navigate your own feelings about the situation. Supporting your child can involve a range of feelings, including fear, confusion, frustration, and even guilt. You may wonder, "Is it my fault?" When you are attempting to understand and navigate the concerning emotions and behaviors that your child may be showing, it is common to wonder what you, as a parent, are doing wrong. These thoughts and feelings can have a negative impact on your wellbeing, as well as affect your relationship with your partner, family, friends, and even your child. Although it is natural to feel this way, it is important that you do not take their concerns as a personal failure. Acknowledge your feelings and reach out for support if you need to. Recognize that your child's mental health struggles are not your fault.

Find support.

Realizing that your child has mental health concerns and reaching out for support can bring up a myriad of feelings. It is normal to feel confused about whom to confide in and where to seek support. Naturally, you want the best advice to ensure that your child is well taken care of. One of the best places to start is your family doctor or your child's pediatrician. It may also help to check with your employer if you have any benefits for counseling support or spaces to talk about your feelings so that you can get support in coping with your own emotions. Many employers also offer benefits that can help you get support for your child.



Engage in self-care.

One way a parent can truly support their child is to engage in care for themselves. It can help to identify activities for physical, intellectual, and emotional self-care, and block some time each day for engaging in them. Although this may sound counterintuitive, this will not only enable you to recharge your own batteries, but it will also teach your child to prioritize their own self-care. Children knowingly or unknowingly often emulate their parents' behaviors. You can help your child build resilience and a positive self-image by engaging in healthy coping strategies like meditation, spending time in nature, and fostering healthy relationships. When your child notices that you take out time to destress in a busy schedule, it can encourage your child to do the same.

Spend time with your child.

One of the most important things you can do for your child is to simply be there for them. This could mean spending quality time with your child, taking an interest in their activities, planning trips with them, or setting aside some parent-child time each day. Depending on your child's age, quality time can vary from arts and craft activities to going for a coffee together or even going to a movie.

Set your child up for success, not failure!

Identify the things your child can do well, and encourage them to take on tasks that are slightly more challenging. When a parent or teacher sets goals for a child that are aligned with the child's strengths, and not based on what other children in their age group are able to do, they help the child build a positive sense of self. Start where your child is, not where you want them to be!

Be consistent.

Children respond positively when they have consistency. Consistency with rules around the house, chores that the children do, and even with reactions from the parents can go a long way in the child feeling secure and self-assured. Having some level of consistency at home helps children cope with new challenges that may come up outside their home.

It is okay to not have all the answers.

Caring for a child's mental health needs may mean that a parent must juggle between the roles of a parent, teacher, therapist, doctor, and even a superhero! While this may seem like what your child is demanding, know that all your child really needs you to be is their parent! They need to know that they have you and can turn to you. You may not have all the "right" answers, and that is okay. You may not have much experience with children's mental health issues, but you do have the experience of knowing your child. Rely on your strengths as a parent, and think about what helps your child thrive.

Turn to the experts.

It is helpful, and often necessary, to seek help and advice from experts in the field. For example, teachers may be able to provide information about the younger children's interactions with their peers at school, as well as their responses to various teaching methods. It is also possible that your child may want to talk about their concerns, but not know how to. School counselors, psychotherapists, and other mental health professionals can help your child identify what



is going on and give your child tools to cope. And while these professionals may be field experts, know that you are the expert when it comes to your child's unique needs. You, as parents, can provide a wealth of information about your child's behaviors at home, including their strengths, challenges, and what has or has not worked for your child in the past. When parents and professionals come together in the interests of the child, it is then that the child can truly flourish.

Address stigma associated with mental health.

Parents and children are often hesitant to reach out for support for fear of judgment or due to concerns about stigma related to mental health. This can mean that the child does not get support even when it is available. One way to tackle this is to share concerns with the people you feel you can trust. Reach out to friends or family who have been supportive in the past. Talk to your child about a friend or an adult outside your home that your kid may feel comfortable going to.

Advocate for your child.

When seeking help and support for your child, you may feel like you or your child are not being understood or sufficiently accommodated. Whether it is long wait times or getting the right support for your child, advocating for your child can feel like an uphill battle. What may help is knowing and remembering that you are not alone. There may be

support groups available in your area that may help you get connected with other parents or caregivers who have gone through similar struggles. It may also help you to become aware of your rights as parents. If your child is in school, it may help to check about the school's preferred ways of communication, and to read brochures or parent guides informing what the school can do to help.

Here's what organizations can do to help and support parents.

Often, the biggest challenge a parent faces is finding accurate and reliable sources that can answer their questions. The mental health needs of a child vary with age and severity, and it is difficult for parents to recognize and keep track of the latest developments in health care that may benefit their child. Schools can help organize informative workshops and seminars to help parents and teachers recognize the signs to look out for. Similarly, employers can also provide seminars related to mental wellbeing and confidential support for parents to express their concerns and get assistance. Employers can also help by offering helplines where parents can reach out to access support.

Further Reading

Below are some additional resources that may provide helpful information and avenues for support.

Books

(For Parents) *Not What I Expected: Help and Hope for Parents of Atypical Children* (May 27, 2015) by Rita Eichenstein
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/316828/not-what-i-expected-by-rita-eichenstein-phd/9780399171765>

(For Children) *How to Tame the Tumblers: The Mindful Self-Compassionate Way* (June 7, 2019) by Eileen Beltzner
<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/41219462>



Websites

"Children's Mental Health," American Psychological Association (APA)
<https://www.apa.org/topics/children/mental-health>

Children's Mental Health hub, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/index.html>

Reference

1. Chavez, J. (2023, January 31). Children's mental health tops list of parent worries, survey finds. CNN. Retrieved April 13, 2023, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/31/health/mental-health-parenting-survey/index.html>

Source: Janardhanan, A. (2023, January 6). *The effects of children's mental health on parents* (B. Schuette, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO). Retrieved April 13, 2023, from the WPO Blog: <https://www.workplaceoptions.com/news-media/blogs>