

Positive Parenting: Interventions and Resources for Parents and Providers Supporting Children with Mental Health Concerns – Tip Sheet

Mental Health Skills 101: *By learning and practicing coping skills, parents and providers can increase support and reduce frustration in the parental and provider roles of mental health recovery for children and adolescents. Below include three outlines of three skills – based therapeutic modalities.*

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: [CBT](#):**

1. Identifying Negative Thoughts: Recognize and articulate thoughts and feelings.
2. Challenging Negative Thoughts: Educate to question thought validity.
3. Problem-Solving Skills: Identify problem, brainstorm, and evaluate solutions, choose action.
4. Emotional Regulation: Use of coping skills and attuning engagement.
5. Behavioral Activation: Engage in activities that provide joy and sense of accomplishment.
6. Setting Realistic Goals: SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound).
7. Positive Reinforcement: Acknowledge and celebrate small successes to build confidence.
8. Open Communication: Cultivate safe space to express thoughts and feelings without judgment.
9. Encourage Self-Compassion: Positive self-talk and grace to reduce feelings of shame or inadequacy.

- **Dialectical Behavioral Therapy: [DBT](#):**

1. Mindfulness: Presence in the moment. Observe thoughts and sensations. Have awareness and let go of judgement. Reduce suffering and increase happiness by increasing control of the mind.
2. Distress Tolerance: Engage in positive distractions or soothing activities to manage overwhelming emotions. Survive crisis situations without worsening them. Accept reality by replacing “stuckness” in suffering with ordinary pain and possibility of moving forward. Become free from having to satisfy the demands of desires, urges, and intense emotions.
3. Interpersonal Effectiveness: Be skillful in getting what you want or need from others. Build relationships and end destructive ones. Walk the middle path to sustain balance in relationships.
4. Emotional Regulation: Understand and name emotions. Decrease the frequency of unwanted emotions, and emotional vulnerability/suffering.
5. Validation: Acknowledge emotions to increase feelings of being understood and heard. Offer emotional support to promote recovery and connection.
6. Problem Solving: Break down challenges into manageable steps and collaboratively brainstorm solutions.

- **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: [ACT](#):**

1. Acceptance: Encourage acceptance of thoughts/feelings rather than fighting or suppressing them.
2. Cognitive Defusion: Detach from thoughts to reframe them as words and images as opposed to truths which dictate actions.
3. Mindfulness: Promote present awareness and engagement.
4. Values Clarification: Work to identify core values to assist in decision making.
5. Committed Action: Practice making decisions in alignment with values despite external pressures.
6. Self as Context: Moving from “I am no good” to “I am having thoughts that I am no good”.

Self-Care and Positive Role Modeling: *Integrating balance and boundaries into parents' lives and modeling this for children can improve outcomes and foster healthy relationships.*

WHY SELF CARE? - 1 in 14 children have a caregiver struggling with their mental health increasing likelihood of poor physical health, emotional or developmental disability, and higher ACE scores. (Wolicki et al., 2021).

HEALTH Model for Providers, Parents, and Children:

H: Health and Wellness – Maintain overall health and wellness: exercise, nutrition, sleep, and building community.

E: Evidence Based Practices – Therapy and medication management via evidence-based practices.

A: Attention to Family – Healing occurs within the family unit. Valuing wellness for every member.

L: Live in the Moment – Mindfulness and meditation for healing and recovery.

T: Teach Life Skills – Practicing and teaching foundation skills to sustain mental health over time.

H: Help the Community – Community connection improves mental health outcomes and healthy integration into social systems.

Child dysregulation can be triggered when caregivers have unresolved trauma, intrapersonal conflict, cognitive dissonance, etc. Past experiences inevitably impact caregiving. Self-compassion and non-judgmental posture toward self-improve quality of care and long-term outcomes (Siegel & Hartzell, 2014).

WHY POSITIVE ROLE MODELING? - Modeling repeated and unrepaired examples of poor self-awareness, emotional projection, self-abandonment, unhealthy boundaries, and self-neglect to children at formative ages can have a significant negative impact on social emotional wellness and behavior (Siegel & Hartzell, 2014).

- **Social Learning Theory** = Social and behavioral learning occurs via observation of knowledgeable others' behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions and the evaluation of respective consequences (Bandura, 1977).
- **Regulation** = Ability to use prefrontal cortex: making informed choices in response to child needs, dysregulation, or concerning behaviors. Regulation requires self-awareness, mindfulness, and intentional self-care. Parental dysregulation is akin to disorganization (Siegel & Hartzell, 2014).
- **Coherence** = State of mind where internal world has ability to adapt to constantly changing external world. Coherence allows for sense of connection with self and others (Siegel & Hartzell, 2014).
- **Attunement** = The process of aligning with another person or being "in-step" with them. Use **Curiosity, Openness, Acceptance, and Love** in connection. "Children need us to attune to them in order to achieve the physiological balance that enables them to create a coherent mind" (Siegel & Hartzell, 2014).

Mental Health Resource Maze: *Know what resources and barriers exist for parents and families to mental health care and treatment.*

BARRIERS: (Jukes et al., 2024)

- **Psychological Factors:** Social Stigma, shame/embarrassment, perception of help-seeking as weakness, fear of CPS intervention, distrust, negative parental experiences of mental health intervention, belief that problem solely exists within the child and not within parenting, feeling unprepared or unmotivated.
- **Situational Factors:** Competing demands (work, commitments, childcare needs, illness, etc.), transportation difficulties, inconvenient times / long wait times, heavy involvement requirements, treatment affordability, and child refusal of treatment. Demographic factors may present marginalized barriers: single parent, co-parenting, young parent, multiple children, family conflict, living in disadvantaged communities, communities with high levels of antisocial behavior.
- **Lack of Knowledge/Awareness:** Lack of knowledge of treatments and interventions that exist, unclear treatment expectations or objectives.
- **Program/Intervention Experiences:** Program content not tailored to unique family needs, overly clinical or academic language, content misaligned with cultural or family values, content being too mother-focused, poor orientations, negative past experiences, perception of inadequate treatment, treatment attrition due to lack of perceived quick success, perception that programming is intended for more problematic concerns or families, fewer opportunities for father-based interventions.
- **Practitioner Characteristics:** perceived inability for practitioner to manage groups, disliking interactional style, inadequate understanding of parental or child concerns.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Websites

- PESI: [Continuing education and trainings on various therapies, current research, and interventions](#)
- CDC: [Positive parenting tips: Age categorized developmental milestones, positive parenting tips, safety recommendations, health tips](#)
- UW Madison BRAVE Research Collaborative: [Current active research study on “Self-compassion for Children and Caregivers”](#)
- [DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets – Marsha M. Linehan, Ph.D.](#)

Books

- Parenting from the Inside Out - Daniel J. Siegel M.D. and Mary Hartzell M.Ed.
- The Explosive Child - Ross Green Ph.D.
- Raising An Emotionally Intelligent Child - John Gottman, Ph.D.
- Parenting with Love and Logic - Foster Cline, M.D. and Jim Fay
- The Yes Brain: How to Cultivate Courage, Curiosity, and Resilience in Your Child -Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.