

Cognitive Behavioural Approaches

Focus on the connections between thoughts, actions and feelings in order to:

- Change negative thought patterns and beliefs
- Create opportunities for experiencing and reinforcing successes that counter feelings of helplessness
- Foster skills to increase positive relationships with peers and others

Family-Centred Practices

As a family, take time to understand the nature of depression or anxiety and their impact on the functioning of your child. Engage with your school guidance counsellor to discuss your concerns for your child, and to explore additional supports or interventions that might be helpful. Important tips for families include:

- Describe your child's areas of concern and strength from your perspective, in your words.
- Ask for clarification to ensure effective communication and understanding of school interventions (e.g., "Are you saying that..."; "I think that you mean...; Is that right?").
- Talk about what is working and not working for your child.
- Maintain ongoing positive and constructive communication with school staff and counsellors.
- Ask for suggestions on things that you can try at home to support school programming on emotional well-being.

Be Aware of Changes in Your Child's Mental Health

Downward changes in mood, level of hope or functioning should be monitored by families and schools. At times, the intensity of interventions for your child may need to be temporarily "stepped up" to address their needs. Work with your school to decide if or when there is a need to involve the school's Child and Youth Team, including consultations with child health specialists (psychiatrists, psychologists or other mental health professionals).

Solution-Focused Practices

Solution-focused practices are future-oriented, goal-directed, and focus on solutions rather than only on the problems. Example solution-focused practices include:

- **Look for previous solutions:** To help your child see potential solutions, ask: "Are there times when this has been less of a problem?" or "What did you (or others) do that was helpful?"
- **Look for exceptions:** Even when your child does not have a previous solution that can be repeated, they may have recent examples of when the problem didn't seem so challenging. This can be explored by asking: "What is different about the times when this was less of a problem?"
- **Ask present or future-oriented questions:** Such questions support the belief that problems are best addressed by focusing on what is already working, and how your child would like their life to be. An example question might be: "What will you be doing in the next week that would indicate to you that you are continuing to make progress?"

- **Give compliments and positive feedback:** Compliments can help to highlight what your child is doing that is working. Compliments are often conveyed in the form of appreciatively toned questions such as: “How did you do that?” This approach invites the young person to self-compliment by virtue of answering the question.
- **Encourage more of what is working:** Gently invite your child to do more of what has previously worked, or to try changes they have brought up that they would like to try – frequently called “an experiment.”
- **Ask the miracle question:** The miracle question or “problem is gone” question is one way that you can invite your child to envision and describe in detail how the future will be different when the problem is no longer present. This can provide hope that the problem is temporary, and that things will begin to be better.

- **Use rating questions:** Rating questions help young people to assess their own situations or track their own progress on a scale of 1 to 10. You can ask rating questions about motivation, hopefulness, depression, confidence, and progress that has been made, or to determine what might be the next small steps. By having them assign a rating to their feelings, they can better understand that feelings change, and that problems are not always as bad as they may seem in the moment.
- **Ask coping questions:** Coping questions such as: “How have you managed to do that so far?” or “How have you managed to prevent things from becoming more challenging?” open up a different way of looking at resiliency and determination, and acknowledge your child’s inner strength.

Skill Building

Explore resources that are designed to enhance your child's social-emotional well-being.

- **Self-awareness** involves understanding your own emotions, personal goals and values. High levels of self-awareness require the ability to recognize how thoughts, feelings and actions are interconnected.
- **Self-management** (emotional regulation) requires skills and attitudes that help you to regulate your own emotions and behaviours. This includes the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses and persevere through challenges in order to achieve personal and educational goals.

- **Social awareness** involves the ability to understand, empathize and feel compassion for others. It also involves understanding social norms and recognizing sources of family, school and community support.
- **Relationship skills** help your child initiate and sustain healthy relationships. Skills may include communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, coping with peer pressure, managing conflict and seeking help when it is needed.

- **Responsible decision-making** involves learning how to make constructive choices. It requires the ability to consider the health and well-being of self and others, and to consider the consequences of selected actions.

Try these resources for practicing social-emotional awareness at home:

<https://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PDF-22-raising-caring-confident-capable-children.pdf>

<https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-parent-resources>

<https://zonesofregulation.com/index.html>

Emphasize the Positive

Modelling and coaching positive self-talk: Parents and caregivers can encourage the use of positive self-talk by modelling how it can be applied during times of challenge. Youth can also be coached in the development of positive self-talk. For example, prior to undertaking a new task or challenge, invite your child to take a deep breath and build confidence by saying to themselves: “I can do it. It’s important to try,” or “It’s okay to make mistakes.”

Exploring strengths and gifts: Encouraging your child to explore and engage personal strengths and gifts is important. Integrating such areas in daily routines and in home, school or social activities contributes to positive emotions, increased readiness for positive change, enhanced adaptation and the development of positive social relationships. Talk to your child often about their strengths and gifts, and how those things will contribute to a successful life.

Taking part in enjoyable activities: Creating learning or leisure activities that reflect the interests or passions of young people increases their motivation to become active participants in interactions with others. Enjoyable activities contribute to positive experiences and emotions and higher satisfaction with daily living activities. Work with your child to develop a menu of activities that can be used within their schedules as a source of encouragement and positive reinforcement.