

Supporting your Child's Well-being Through Connection and Open Communication

Growing up can be hard. For children and teens who are new to the U.S., it can be even harder. They are learning a new language, culture, and school system while making new friends and figuring out who they are. During this time, it is normal for many youth to need extra support from caregivers and other trusted adults. At the same time, they may pull away or talk less. This guide offers simple ideas that can help you talk with your child in ways that can help them share more openly. It also explains common signs that a child may need more support, and where to find it.

Communication Tips

If you notice changes in your child's behavior or feel concerned about their stress or emotions, starting a conversation can be an important first step. Even when children or teens seem well, it's common for them to become more private or less talkative as they grow. The tips below can help you gently open communication and stay connected to your child's experiences and challenges.



- **Stay calm**, even when topics are hard.
- Allow children to **share openly** without fear of punishment.
- **Acknowledge their feelings** before trying to fix the problem.
- Give them your **full attention**.
- Acknowledge that your **child's experiences may look or feel different** from your own. Don't interrupt, lecture, or rush to solutions.
- Ask **open-ended questions** to move beyond "yes" and "no" responses.
For example: Instead of "Did you have a good day?" try "Tell me about your day," or, "What was the best/worst part of your day?"
- **Offer choices** whenever possible. **Don't pressure** your child to talk before they're ready, but ask directly about safety if you're concerned.
- **Revisit difficult conversations** again later if needed.
- Look for **everyday moments** to talk (walks, meals, etc.) and spend one-on-one time together regularly.
- End with **reassurance** and **connection**.

Communication Tips (continued)

Consider using conversation starters, such as:

- “Tell me about a topic that was discussed in your class today.”
- “What’s something at school that feels easy right now? What’s something that feels stressful?”
- “You’ve seemed a little quieter lately. How are things feeling for you?”
- “What’s something you’re proud of from this week?”
- “I’ve noticed you seem a bit different lately, and I wanted to check in. How are you doing?”

Simple phrases to try during conversations:

- “That sounds really hard.”
- “Thank you for telling me.”
- “If you ever feel unsafe, I want you to tell me so we can get help.”
- “I don’t know the answer, but we can find help together.”



Signs Your Older Child or Teen May Be Experiencing Emotional Distress

Even with strong support at home, some youth will still experience emotional distress at times. Older children and teens often show this through changes in their mood or behavior. Here are some signs that indicate your child may need additional support:

- **Sleep disruptions** (too much sleep, too little sleep, or nightmares)
- **Isolating themselves** or **not enjoying** activities they used to enjoy
- Frequently **irritable, short-tempered,** or **angry**
- **Worrying** or **overthinking**
- Feeling **sad** or **crying** often
- **Difficulty concentrating** or remembering things
- **Acting out** or appearing defiant
- **Frequent physical complaints** (headaches, stomachaches, fatigue, body pain, etc.)



Signs Your Younger Child May Be Experiencing Emotional Distress

Younger children often express emotional distress through changes in behavior, play, or physical complaints since they do not have the words to express how they feel. Some signs to watch out for include:



- Reverting to younger behaviors (thumb-sucking, bed wetting, etc.)
- Intense clinginess, or fear of being alone
- Play related to past traumatic events
- Physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches, lack of appetite, etc.)
- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, shouting or crying in their sleep
- Increased irritability, fussiness, tantrums, and misbehaving
- Feeling sad, withdrawn, or quiet

Additional Support

Support for your child can come from many places, including family members, cultural or faith leaders, teachers or school personnel, and trusted people or programs in the community. Some youth also benefit from talking with a counselor, who can help them talk about their stress and learn healthy ways to cope. Seeing a counselor is very common in the U.S. and does not mean your child has a long-term illness. Many newcomer families have found counseling helpful. If you want to learn more about counseling, talk with your child's pediatrician, caseworker, or school.



In Urgent or Crisis Situations

If your child is experiencing a mental health crisis, severe emotional distress, or if you believe your child is in danger of injuring or harming themselves, call **988** or go to the nearest hospital or emergency department right away. **988 is the national suicide and crisis lifeline** – it is available 24/7 and when you call, you can ask for an interpreter in your language.

Remember, asking for help is normal and okay. You are not alone, and support is available for you and your family.

