

## **Supporting Your Child with a Mental Health Challenge**

It is always difficult to watch a child struggle, especially with a mental health challenge. And while therapy, medication (where applicable) and other supportive treatments are all options, there are also tools parents can rely on to help manage the situation and find relief.

### **Unconditional Love**

This may be obvious, but for children who suffer from mental health challenges, ensuring they feel loved and valued is critical. Often, children with difficulties may act on impulse, use hurtful language and create challenges in the home. Regardless of the situation, try and remain present, take deep breaths, and remind yourself that these actions are a result of the mental health challenge and are not a reflection of your child. Focusing on your relationship, spending some quality time and sharing feelings of respect and love for your child – despite their actions – is an important step towards achieving emotional well-being.

### **Focus on Positivity**

Mental health challenges can be all-encompassing and easily cloud an individual's thoughts with worry and negativity. However, there are ways to help remind your child (and yourself) that the diagnosis doesn't define them and that they are valuable:

- Share with your child one good thing that you noticed about them or their behavior each day
- Tell them about famous people – or people in their family- who had a similar diagnosis yet achieved great life accomplishments
- Greet your child warmly when he/she enters a room
- Make a list of your child's strengths and wonderful qualities and remind your child of them

### **Have a chat with the school**

Children with mental health challenges might have a hard time keeping up with what is expected of them in school. This can put a child on edge. You are your child's best advocate. Talk to your children's school to see what accommodations can be made and which services they can provide. Some schools have social workers or counselors who may share information about your child's challenge and ways to help. In addition, this information may be helpful for the mental health professionals managing your child's care.

### **Expectations**

Most parents focus on the future dreams they have for their children. And while that is a normal part of raising a family, when handling a child with mental health challenges, it

is best to stay in the present. In situations where expectations are required, be mindful of what you expect. Children with mental health challenges behave unpredictably. They may have trouble with behavioral norms or academic milestones. This can lead to stress and frustration. Work with your child to set realistic, measurable, and achievable goals. This will help the family unit structure a routine that works – decreasing stress and anxiety.

### **Sibling Management**

Some siblings might be resentful if another child is getting all the attention. Try to spend quality time with your other children so that they feel heard. Make sure that they understand what their sibling is going through and provide tools, when needed, to help them manage the situation.

### **Reinforce the foundations**

Managing mental health challenges in children can shake the foundations of the family. It is essential that the family unit be as healthy and strong as possible during this difficult time. Family therapy may be an excellent resource for those who are interested.

### **Support**

The stronger your child's support system, the better. Get rid of influences that might have a negative impact on your child. If there's someone in your child's circle who invalidates your child's struggles, consider decreasing exposure. You are the best advocate for your child and it is crucial for their emotional well-being that they have a supportive environment.

If you suspect that your child needs help, reach out to Relief for guidance on the next steps.