

Mental Health Awareness Month Family Activities

Did you know that May is Mental Health Awareness Month? During this time of social distancing so many people are struggling with maintaining a healthy emotional state. The COVID-19 pandemic represents the greatest crisis to ever hit community mental health and addiction treatment providers. As humans, we are naturally inclined to spend time with others. When this is limited, we all struggle. Here are some facts about Mental Health:

- 1 in 5 adults in America experience a mental illness.
- Nearly 1 in 25 (10 million) adults in America live with a serious mental illness.
- One-half of all chronic mental illness begins by the age of 14; three-quarters by the age of 24.
- Approximately 10.2 million adults have co-occurring mental health and addiction disorders.

We all know about handwashing, exercising, and healthy eating to maintain good physical health but how can you support and educate your children about good mental health? Try some of these activities:

Pre-K- Elementary:

The Disney movie "Inside Out" is a fantastic movie for young children. Have a movie night with your kids, make some tasty snacks and then ask them some of these questions:

- Riley's 5 emotions were all in control of her at some points. What does it look like for you when those emotions are in control of you?
- What are some of your core memories?
- Are any emotions bad?
- What emotions are easiest for you to feel? Which are the hardest?
- What are some ways to cope with sadness, fear, disgust?
- How can you be angry without hurting anyone? How can you be joyful and help others to feel Joy with you?

- Draw an outline of a body, and color in where you feel different emotions in your body.

GoNoodle is a popular kids YouTube channel that provides lots of opportunities for fun and engaging movement breaks. They also have a whole section on calming and relaxing strategies they call GoNoodle - Flow.

CosmicKids Yoga, available on YouTube, is a great tool for movement breaks that support regulation, breathing and mindfulness.

PBS.org is another great website with lots of resources for families. There are activities targeted for children from 2 years to 8 years old around emotional awareness, self-management, and social skills. Some of these family friendly activities also involve some PBS shows, which can be engaging for kids.

Middle/High School:

The “Inside Out” movie is also great for older students and the same questions could also be asked of them. In addition, Middle and High school students like to have their opinions heard. Sit with your child (or sometimes it is easier to talk with them without looking at them like in the car or on a walk) and ask them the following:

- Have you ever experienced being labeled, branded or discredited?
- Do you think tv/movies/social media lead to a negative image of mental health issues?
- Have you ever seen a family member or a friend perpetuate a negative image of mental health issues?

Teens and pre-teens are very stressed and anxious nowadays, even more so without being able to physically connect with their peers. After you have had the conversation about mental health try this activity with your teen:

- List 5 places you would like to travel to
- What are 2 images for each of those locations
- Make a folder in your pictures of each of
- these images so you can look at them when you are having a difficult moment

- Make a COVID Bucket List. Each time you miss out on something because of staying at home, add it to the list. Then, you have a list of fun activities to do in the future.
- Opportunities to practice mindfulness with free phone or computer applications, including the Calm app or Headspace
- Make/ decorate a gratitude jar. Use fun household items or things from nature and add one item each day that represents something you are grateful for!
- The practice of gratitude and positive affirmations can be supportive to overall mental health. ThinkUp is an example of a free app that allows teens to pick affirmation topics and record them in their own voice.

As always, your counseling team is available for you and your child if you need support.

Resources: <https://www.ffcmh.org/cmha-activities-for-youth>

<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/mental-health-month/>