Supporting Your Kid's Mental Health Needs and Our Own As We Navigate Changing School Environments

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Fall 2021 unfortunately was not quite the return to normal many of expected or hoped for...

And no where close to the kind of return to school that our kids needed......

And even though the return to in person school brought back some familiar 'anchors' we and our kids rely on...

Covid-19 continues to challenge....

our kids, our schools,

Ourselves, as parents

and all who care for and about kids....



Finding the return to school a little stressful..

- Wondering what you can do to make a tough situation a little easier for yourself and kids?
- Looking for strategies to get a handle on your own anxiety so you can better support and reassure your kids?
- Hoping to make this strange and uncertain school year feel a little less overwhelming for your kids and your family?

You are not alone!

Parents across the Michigan and the nation are finding this to-school season more stressful even than last year and are searching ideas and support to help along the way!

Today's Objectives

Discuss

• New and familiar stressors which will challenge all kids this year including changes in schedules, learning environments, routines, and the lingering affects of the past 2 years.

Highlight

 How these changes and challenges are hard for all kids and may be especially difficult for kids who struggle with anxiety, depression or other existing/emerging mental health issues.

Share

• A variety of practical tips, strategies and tools you can use to help support your child's learning, emotional and social development and success this school year, whether they are attending in person, virtually, hybrid or a mix.

Provide

• Provide tips, strategies and resources to help you support your child's mental health and wellness and your own as you navigate yet another challenging school year together.



New Year ~ Different Challenges Discussion Question

What challenges have you and your kids experienced so far this fall; Or, What are you most concerned, worried, or excited about as it continues?



Covid Continues to Challenge Learning Environments for ALL Children & Youth

Being a kid during a pandemic continues to be incredibly challenging and stressful due to...

- Ongoing uncertainty and change
- New expectations and realities
- Different/changing levels of isolation
- Fear of what might happen next
- The ongoing threat of the sudden removal or altered access to peers, teachers and other formal and informal activities and supports that all kids rely on.
- And most kids are dealing with some level of trauma after all of the uncertainty of the past two years...

What's is trauma and how is it related....

- Trauma is an emotional response to a distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope.
- Safety matters... and all of kid's physical and emotional safety have been challenged over the past 2 years.
- Trauma affects individual youth in different ways, but most kids have experienced some level of trauma during the pandemic.
- And many have experienced trauma that has overwhelmed their ability to cope..







Trauma is tough on the brain

Trauma Impact at school

- Trauma can negatively affect academic performance.
- Trauma can undermine and/or challenge critical learning skills.
- Trauma can affect a student's ability to focus or pay attention in the classroom.
- Trauma also affects social and emotional development.
- Trauma can affect moods and behavior.





For students, feeling safe is important.

After meeting basic needs for survival like food, water, and sleep, feeling safe and secure is necessary before anyone can focus on relationships, learning, or other opportunities for personal success.





Classroom Strategies to Support All Kids to Feel Safe at School

- Prioritize social and emotional well being over academics.
- Focus on helping kids rebuild social connections/relationships.
- Create a safe and 'open' space.
- Be open about your feelings model coping strategies.
- Give them a sense of control!
- Develop classroom rules and expectations together.
- Make sure kids feel their voices are heard and valued!
- Be patient when kids act out.
- Partner with families!
- Keep an eye out for kids who are struggling and connect them to additional help if needed.

Utilize and Share Helpful Tools from Jack.org and others





Other Ideas to Help Kids Feel Safe at School? or Strategies to Build Strong Classrooms, Schools or Learning Communities...?

What can kids do to help themselves feel safe at school?

- Be Prepared
- Identify adults/peers you trust
- Share your fears and concerns
- Find tools you can use if you feel overwhelmed or stressed such as using 'grounding items/activities'

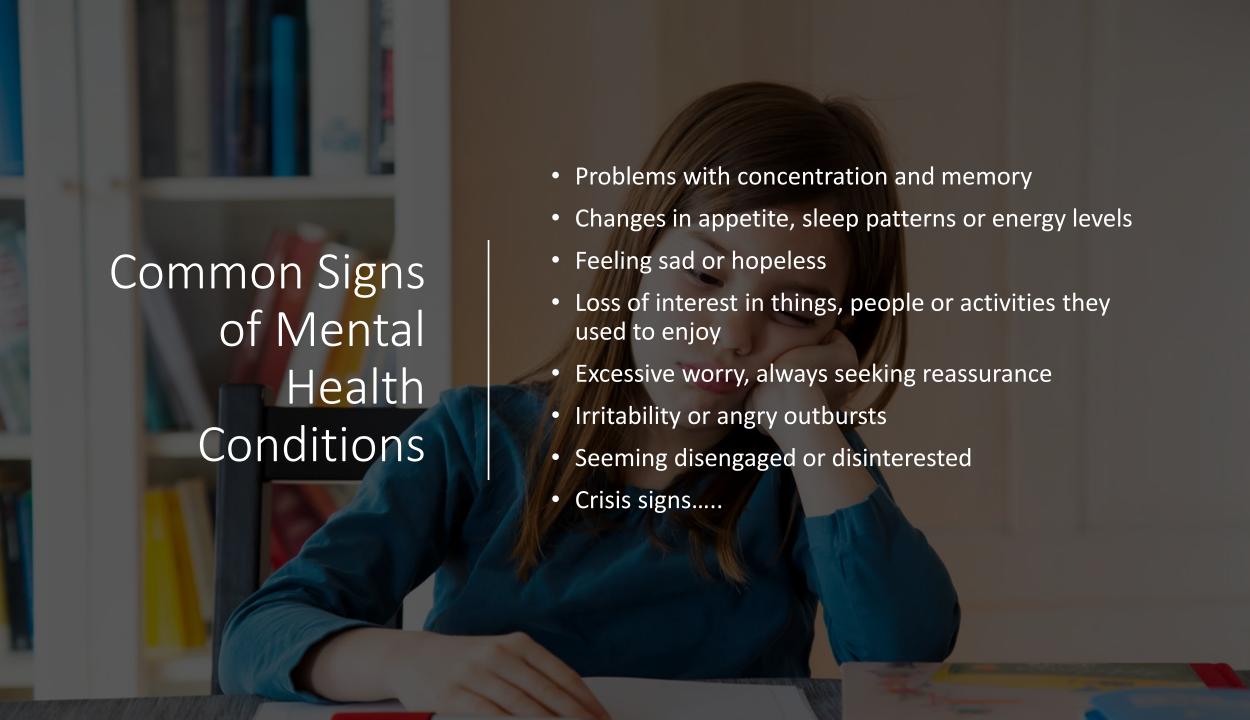


Support at Home is Key and #1 Predictor of Success

Tips to Create a Supportive Home Environment:

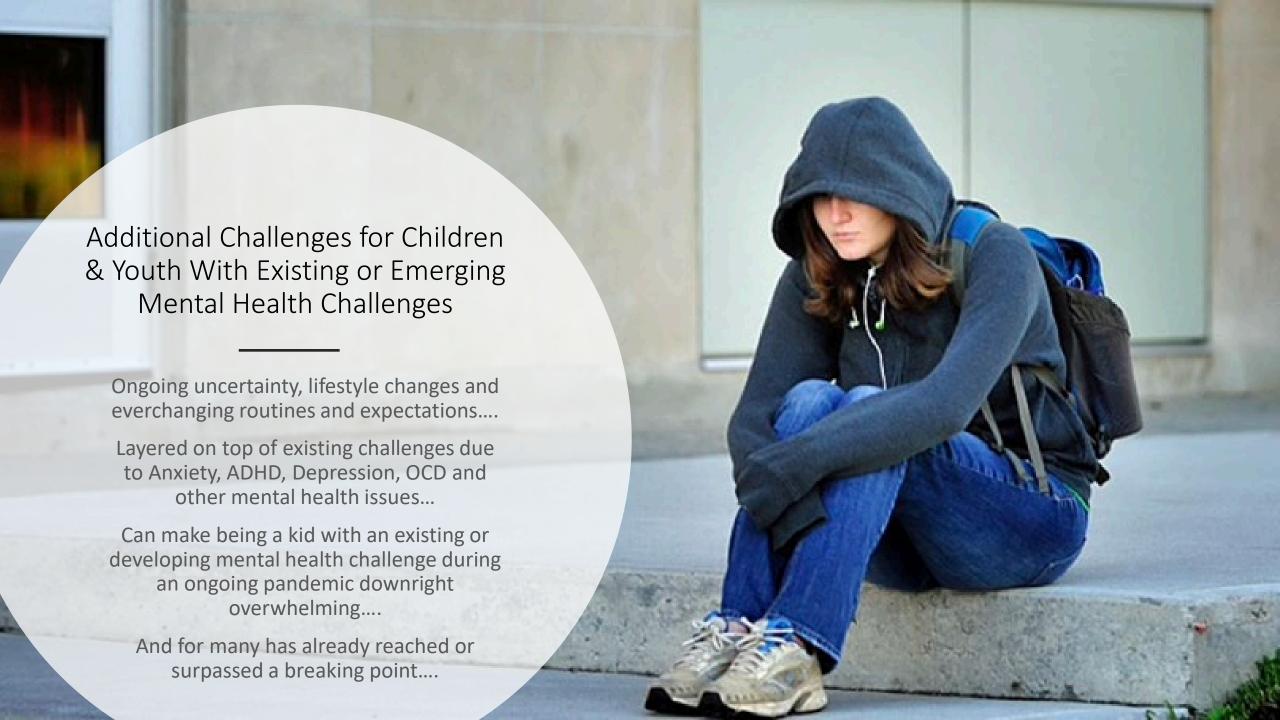
- Remember to take care of your own mental health!
- Check your expectations and anticipate challenges.
- Learn all you can about how the stress/trauma of the last year may be affecting your child or others.
- Partner with the school if your child is struggling emotionally, behaviorally or academically.
- Encourage communication. Be open about your own feelings and be sure they know you hear theirs.
- Share your fears, concerns and struggles and model how you try to mange them.
- Know when your child's struggles may be a sign of something bigger and how to get help if you need it.



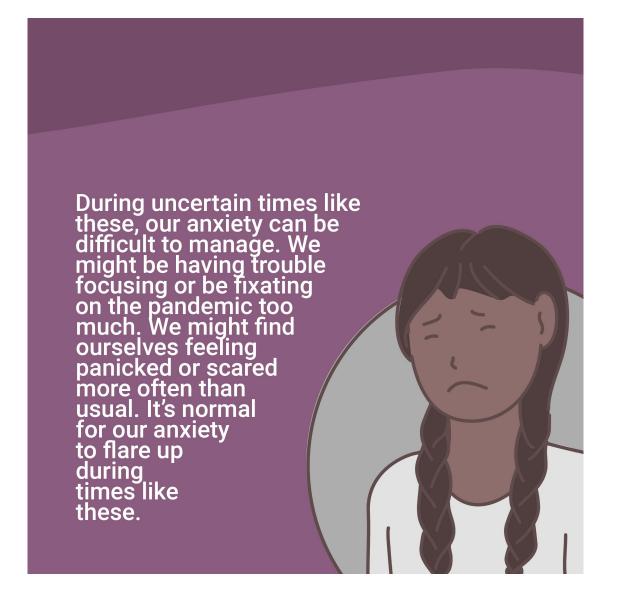


Resources to lean more about emerging or escalating mental health conditions

- ACMH <u>I am Worried About My Child's Mental Health</u> (http://www.acmh-mi.org/get-information/childrens-mental-health-101/i-am-worried-about-my-childs-mental-health/)
- ACMH Get Help Crisis Resource Page (http://www.acmh-mi.org/youth-page/get-help/)
- ACMH <u>I Just Found Out My Child Has A Mental Health Disorder</u> (http://www.acmh-mi.org/get-information/childrens-mental-health-101/i-just-found-out-my-child-has-a-mh-disorder/)
- ACMH What is a Mental Health Crisis & What to Expect if One Occurs (http://www.acmh-mi.org/get-information/childrens-mental-health-101/expect-child-crisis/mental-health-crisis-expect-one-occurs/)
- Mental Health America's
 - <u>Know the Signs: Recognizing mental health Concerns in Kids and Teens</u> (https://mhanational.org/know-signs-recognizing-mental-health-concerns-kids-and-teens)
 - Parent/Youth Online Screening Tools <u>www.MHAScreening.org</u>



Anxiety,
Depression,
and other
mental health
challenges
are on the rise....



Special Challenges for Youth With Anxiety & Depression

Kids who struggle with anxiety or depression may become overwhelmed by the ongoing changes and uncertainty and struggle to manage moods, new 'worries' or new expectations that seem to constantly be changing.. Fluctuating energy can also make it hard to stay motivated and function.

What you might see:

- Irritability
- Difficulty staying focused, making decisions or getting started
- Reluctance or refusal to participate
- Chronic absences or physical complaints
- Getting stuck in 'thinking traps' or on negative thoughts especially when feeling overwhelmed, anxious or powerless.

They may also:

- Avoid activities or people
- Have poor school performance
- Seek excessive reassurance
- Refuse to go or participate in school
- And even act out

Thinking Trap Examples — Jack.org

WHY DISTRACTIONS?

When we're feeling anxious, we can often get stuck on worrying thoughts and upsetting emotions. Finding ways to distract ourselves and **get active** can be a great way to disrupt these patterns and focus on more positive things.

We all find ourselves trapped in our own thoughts sometimes. Whether it's getting stuck worrying about the future, things going on right now, or staying safe. Thinking traps can happen to any and all of us!

> Here are some common thinking traps we might find ourselves stuck in:



COMMON THINKING TRAPS

All or nothing thinking

Catastrophizing

Overgeneralization

Mind reading

Negative filter

EXAMPLE

Everything is either going to be REALLY good or REALLY bad.

The pandemic is never going to end,

I got a C- on my first test, I'm going to fail this whole coursel

I know they're gossiping about me and that post I made on Instagram last night.

So what if I scored 2 goals, I also missed a penalty kick. We lost and it's all my fault.

We can practice how to identify these thinking traps and learn to think more









Tips for Kids With Anxiety

What is helpful?

- Talking about their fears and listening trying not to diminish their concerns.
- Letting them know you are there for them and can and want to help.
- Help them to plan coping strategies and develop/practice skills they can use.
- Encourage and recognize *brave* behavior by helping them to:
 - 'Ride the Wave'
- Help them to be a 'Thought Detective' Examine the evidence about their fears
 - Talk about the difference between 'What Ifs' &'What Is' and help them learn strategies to do that on their own
- Approach and manage fears by creating exposure steps that build from where they are

What isn't helpful?

- Accommodations that 'accommodate' anxiety or avoidance
- Extra time or ignoring issues it just lets anxiety build up
- Journaling and Relaxation Techniques

Tips for Supporting Kids With Depression

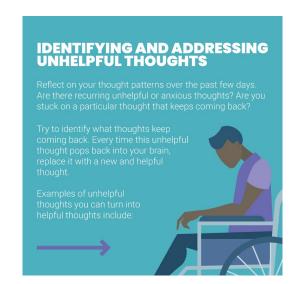
- Create an environment where kids feel comfortable talking about their feelings.
- Listen without judgment or trying to fix or minimize the problem.
- Help them keep a sense of perspective and find some silver linings if you can.
- If your child is stuck in an ongoing circle of negative thoughts and/or focusing on worst case scenarios — It is then ok to start to challenge their thinking a bit.
- Remind kids of challenges they've overcome in the past.
- Help them to create coping strategies to help manage uncertainty/ negative feelings and lists or concrete steps to help them to adapt to day-to-day challenges.
- Support them to make new goals and plans when they are missing the way things
 used to be and help them to reflect upon things they feel grateful for.
- Help them to sort through the things they can and cannot control.
- Support them to use coping strategies for the things/situations they cannot control.

Other Helpful Resources From Mental Health America and Jack.org











Managing
Different
Learning
Environments

In- Person Learning

Virtual Learning

Hybrid

Most kids are returning to in-person learning

It may look the same..

but surely for many or most does not feel the same...

and neither do they....



In Person Learning Advantages

- Increased focus and engagement
- Less ZOOMing
- More hands on learning partnering and collaborating
- Being with friends! And a broader circles of adults
- Reconnection to formal and informal supports – Making seeking or finding help and support easier and more natural with less responsibility on kids and families
- Return to regular day-to-day activities and routines
- Others....



In Person-Learning

Same School – New Struggles For Many Kids with Mental Health Challenges

- Adjusting to new routines, expectations and safety protocols can be overwhelming for students especially those who struggle with organization or rely on familiar routines and predictability.
- Many kids will struggle and spend extra time, energy and brainpower trying to remember new rules, where to go, what to do and not to do, leaving little energy for focusing on the teacher, learning or successfully interacting with peers.
- Kids with Anxiety or OCD may struggle with additional worries and engage in new rituals or repetitive activities to try to manage them.
- Kids who struggle with impulsiveness or behavioral may struggle to adjust to new or changing rules, expectations and requirements affecting their success.



ONE MAJOR CHALLENGE

What used to be normal or come naturally...
may now be stressors
for many kids







Social Challenges













And New Pressures Layered On As Old Ones Remain.....

Academic Challenges







Other Possible Challenges....

There are Some Silver Linings

In the return to In-Person Learning

Some of which can be especially helpful for a few of the specific challenges faced by some children and youth struggling with depression, anxiety or other mood disorders...



Some kids are more ready than others..... But some aren't ready at all...



Common things kids may be concerned about when returning to in person school

- Rules about masking and social distancing can be confusing and can vary from school to school.
- Some kids may worry about getting sick, bringing Covid home, having to quarantine or going virtual.
- Older kids/teens may worry about what their friends think about social distancing, masking, etc...
- Some kids may be concerned about having a stricter schedule and more expectations.
- Others worry about having to be in class all day, sitting still and paying pay attention for long periods.
- Some worry about returning to social situations and pressures.
- Kids with difficulty making or keeping friends may be worried about returning to those struggles.
- And others may be worried about meeting classroom expectations or getting into trouble again....





Supporting Your Child's Return to In Person Learning

In Person Learning – Preparing for Success

Prepare their mind and help them to create coping strategies

- Talk about changes to classroom settings, schedules, routines, safety protocols as well as, likely disruptions.
- Ask what they think things will be like or what is different so you can talk through any specific fears, concerns or frustrations may have.
- Help normalize their uncertainty by letting them know that other kids, families and you have similar concerns or worries.
- Try not to minimize their worries or fears and make sure they know that you and the school are there to help and support them along the way.
- Help kids problem solve what they might do to prepare for new rules, routines or other changes or make things easier or more tolerable for them.
- Encourage them to ask for support if they need it!





In Person Learning – Preparing for Success And School Safety Protocols

Practice to help adjust to new school safety, protocols, rules or routines

- Practice new procedures such as:
 - Wearing a mask
 - Staying 6 feet apart
 - Washing hands
 - Safely share materials and space
- Plan specific ways to still stay close and play with friends while keeping social distance.

Strategies kids can use to feel safe and supported at school

- Be aware of the things that make you feel stressed or out of control and the things that help you.
- List strategies you can use when you feel anxious, overwhelmed or depressed.
- Identify adults and friends you trust at school who can help and support you when you need it.
- Make a plan for how you will handle the things or situations you are worried about.

Other tools or strategies your kids have found helpful?





Special Issues-School Refusal

- Some children and youth may be so anxious about returning to school that they refuse to go.
- This is especially common in kids with anxiety and depression and kids with other learning or social challenges.
- School refusal can occur in any learning environment including in-person and virtual.
- Kids resist or refuse school in different and creative ways.
- Childmind.org has a great resource with tips & strategies for managing school refusal based on what you are experiencing with your child.

Virtual Learning At Home





Successful Virtual Learning Requires

Self Motivation and Control, Focus, Organization, Persistence, and other 'executive functioning' skills, including the ability to stay on task, manage frustration and multi-task...

Many of which are the very skills that lots of kids with ADHD or mental health challenges struggle with..

Making virtual learning stressful and even overwhelming for youth who already have difficulty managing boredom or frustration or in environments that may increase distraction and procrastination...

Virtual Learning Challenges

Lack of face-to-face connections and social connectivity Reduced classroom structure Added distractions from being at home Being responsible to self organize or know what is expected Managing multiple teachers or online learning platforms Technology creates extra headaches and extra steps Larger assignments or projects with multiple pieces Lack of hands-on learning or other learning modes Difficulty shifting out of socializing virtually during school

Virtual Learning - Tips to Help Your Child be Successful

- Prepare for the things you can Set them up for success space, materials.
- Create routines and post schedules for each day, create checklists.
- Master the tech Practice it- List it Troubleshoot problems from last year.
- Keep it interesting while keeping them interested **Mix in movement breaks.
- Try to create clear separations between school/learning/work time and family or play time and develop transition rituals or activities if you can.
- Try accessing directions for classroom tasks/assignments in multiple ways.
- Utilize available resources Communicate w/ teachers Access other supports...
- Ask for help if you need it!
- Create strategies to help kids feel less isolated and more connected.
- Plan specific ways to interact and stay close with friends, teachers, and classmates.
- Other suggestions? Things you have found useful?



Virtual Learning At Home Tips for Families

- Cut yourself some slack! It is ok to take a break or reduce expectations a bit.
- Trust your instincts!
- Remember that you are an expert and that you know your child best. You know what your kids need to focus on most, what they have down and what they struggle with - so feel ok about focusing in on their key needs or the basics and letting the rest go when a break is needed.
- Communicate! Don't hesitate to ask teachers specific details about what to expect and how you can help your child to be successful.
- Don't fall into the 'Guilt Trap'...
- Remember to take care of your own needs too!

Hybrid & Mixed Learning



Additional Challenges

 Keeping track of what to do on what days of the week and adjusting to ever-changing routines can be especially challenging for kids with mental health challenges – especially those who rely on predictability, and daily routines.

What you can do to help

- Create visual schedules for each day of the week.
- Try to create some consistency in each day even on alternating days.

Supporting Your Child's Mental Health



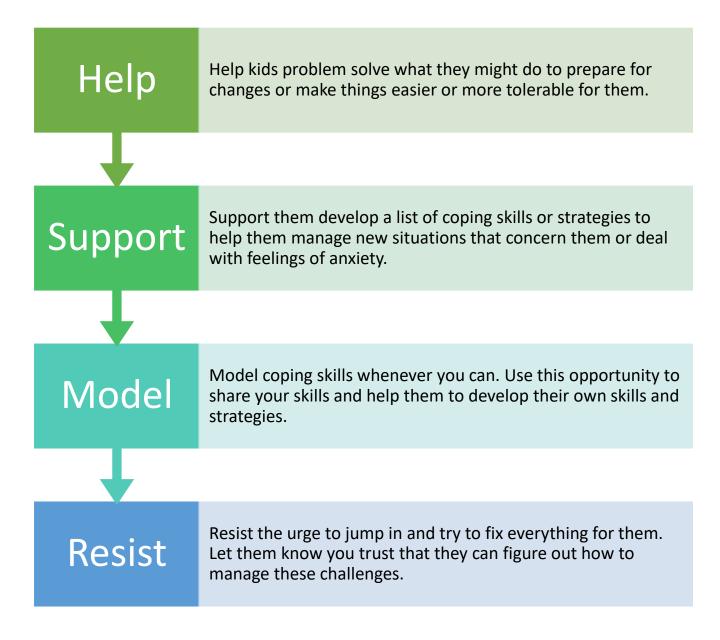
Supporting Your Child's Mental Health in new and changing school environments

1st ~ Prepare Their Mind

Talk	Talk to your your kids about how they are feeling about school and if they have concerns or are worried about any changes, new schedules, protocols or expectations.
Ask	Ask what they think things will be like or what will be different so you can talk through any specific fears, concerns or frustrations may have.
Help	Help normalize their uncertainty by letting them know that other kids, families and you have similar concerns or worries.
Try	Try not to minimize their worries or fears and make sure they know that you and the school are there to help and support them along the way. Help them develop and try out coping skills/strategies too!

Supporting Your Child's Mental Health

Help Them to
Develop
Coping Skills
and Strategies



Tips for Success for Parents

- Check yourself, your mood and be mindful of your interactions with your kids especially if they are struggling to manage their mental health right now. It is ok to prioritize their and your mental health and wellness and focus on having a good and supportive relationship with them right now.
- Try to avoid being hyper-vigilant about everything they do or how they are acting even if you are watching very carefully...
- Try not to worry so much about your child having 'fallen behind'
 last year. Most all kids are in the same boat and most and most
 experts agree that what is most important in the overall
 development of most kids right now is rebuilding connections,
 community, and most importantly social and emotional foundations.
- Even if your child is currently struggling... There are things you can do to support your child's mental health needs. Parents can be ready to advocate for extra support and structure if they notice their child is struggling when school starts again, and at the same time they can reinforce the importance of resilience, which is a major lesson we all learned this past year.
- Trust your instincts!
- Reach out for help and support if they or you need it.



Tips for Success - Families

- Remember that you are not alone!
 Things are still really challenging and everyone is feeling it...
- Stay connected
- Take care of yourself as well as your kids
- Practice self care, mindfulness, and gratitude
- And most importantly have hope!

You can do this ~ And this too shall pass.....

Keep in mind that as a parent of a child with mental health challenges this is not your first rodeo © You have experienced unexpected change, uncertainty and weathered turbulent times before. Rely on and draw from that experience and build upon the things that have helped you and your family in the past.



Don't forgot to support your own mental health.

It is equally important!

Resource Links

- ACMH Back to School 2021 Resource Page (http://www.acmh-mi.org/back-to-school-2020/)
- Mental Health America Back to School Toolkit (https://mhanational.org/back-school-2021-toolkit-download?eType=ActivityDefinitionInstance&eId=52010194-cadd-44a7-9f69-f703ac8529ab)
- Mental Health Ontario School Mental Health Backpack (https://www.family.cmho.org/school-mental-health/)
- <u>Jack.org Covid 19 Mental Health Resource Hub</u> (https://jack.org/Resources/COVID-19-Youth-Mental-Health-Resource-Hub)
- <u>Understood.org Back to School Anxiety in Kids What to Look Out For</u> (https://www.understood.org/articles/en/managing-back-to-school-anxiety)
- MHA Know the Signs: Recognizing Mental Health Concerns in Kids and Teens (https://mhanational.org/know-signs-recognizing-mental-health-concerns-kids-and-teens)
- MDHHS Map of Local Community Mental Health Services (https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550 2941 4868 4899-178824--,00.html)
- MDHHS Covid 19 Mental Health Resources (https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98178 99557---,00.html)

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www.ACMH-MI.ORG

Questions? Or Need Additional Assistance

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Stay Connected



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