



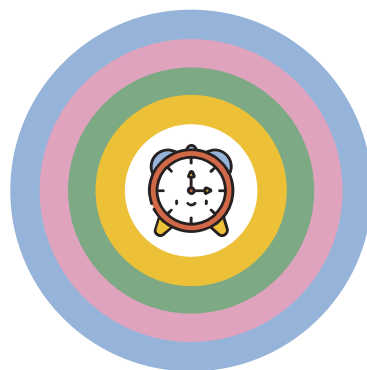
Boston Child Study Center
BOSTON · LOS ANGELES · MAINE
Expert Mental Health Treatment, Training & Research

It's Time To Time In

Supporting Mental Health in Early and Middle Childhood

Kaitlyn Wilbur-Smith, Psy.D., PMH-C
Director of Selective Mutism Services
Licensed Clinical Psychologist
Boston Child Study Center

*Brookwood School
February 2, 2023*



Today's Agenda



1

Overview

What do we mean by childhood mental health? What can we do to prevent mental health issues? When do we intervene?



2

Role of Parents

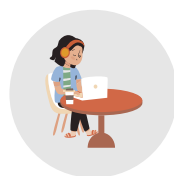
Parents can play a significant role in supporting their children's mental health



3

Early Childhood

Parenting strategies for early childhood (youth aged 3-8)



4

Middle Childhood

Parenting strategies for middle childhood (older youth aged 8-14)



5

Questions

Time for your thoughts and questions about childhood mental health

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is our emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

- It affects how we think, feel, and act
- It plays a role in how we respond to stress, interact with others, and make decisions
- It exists on a continuum, meaning that someone can experience poor mental health without having a mental illness
- Mental health is important from childhood and adolescence through adulthood as it contributes to one's overall health

Being Mentally Healthy in Childhood



Reaching developmental and emotional milestones

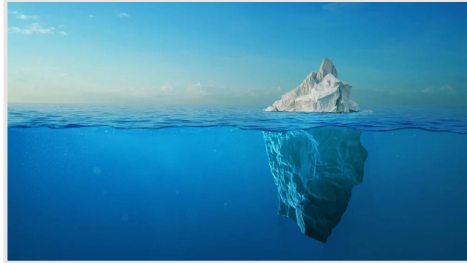
Learning and using social skills

Coping effectively when problems arise

Having a positive quality of life

Functioning well at home, at school, and in the community

Common Mental Health Concerns in Childhood



9.8%

ADHD

9.4%

Anxiety

4.4%

Depression

4.4%

Behavioral
issues

Rising Mental Health Issues

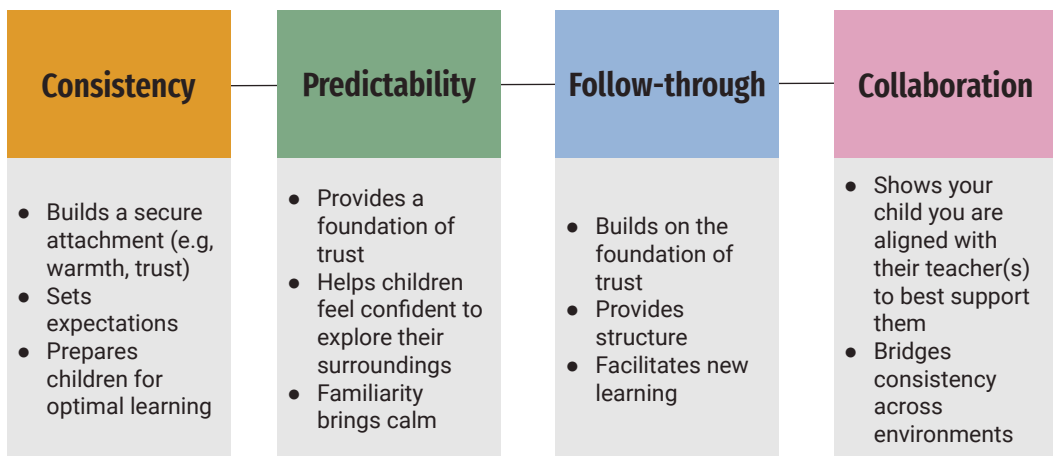
Mental health conditions are increasing worldwide.

- 1 in 6 children ages 2-8 have a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder
- Anxiety and depression among youth ages 3-17 have increased over the last five years
- 50% of lifetime mental health conditions begin before the age of 14
- Evidence-based treatments are the preferred approaches as they have scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness in reducing clinical symptoms

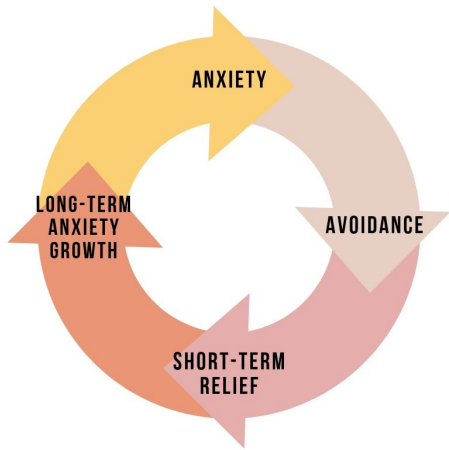
Role of Parents & Caregivers



Role of Parents & Caregivers: What To Focus On



What To Focus On: An Example



Situation: Your child is having a hard time talking aloud during whole classroom instruction or group time at school.

Parental urge: Ask the teacher for an accommodation so your child doesn't have to feel anxious or speak in a group setting.

What to focus on: Resist the urge to overprotect your child from having an emotion (in this case, anxiety). **Consistently** create opportunities for your child to practice being brave (e.g., speaking in smaller groups first). **Prepare** your child ahead of time. **Collaborate** with teachers to set reasonable goals. **Follow-through** with praise and encouragement for brave behavior.

Consistency

Predictability

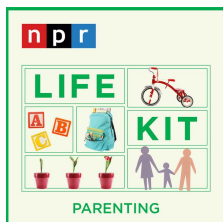
Follow-through

Collaboration

Timing In: Special Time

Special Time refers to a specific type of child-led play between a caregiver and child

- Engaging in 5 minutes of “special time” per day has been shown to be instrumental in developing and maintaining a positive parent-child relationship
- Child-led play means letting the child choose the activity and lead the conversation



The 5-minute daily playtime ritual that can get your kids to listen better

Updated December 21, 2022 · 1:32 PM ET ©



BECKY HARLAN



SUMMER THOMAD



14-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST



Special Time: What To Do and Say

PRIDE skills are specific play therapy skills to implement during Special Time

- The best play activities for Special Time include creative and constructive toys, such as Magnatiles, Legos, blocks, coloring/drawing/chalk, toy cars/trucks, and human/animal figurines
- PRIDE skills help you know what TO say to make the play engaging, special, and unique for your child

Praise

Praise specific behavior you like and want to see more of

Reflect

Reflect or paraphrase what your child says

Imitate

Mimic your child's appropriate play

Describe

Behaviorally describe what your child is doing during play

Enjoy

Enjoy your time together with your child

- Try to refrain from questions, commands, or criticism during Special Time as they take the lead away from your child

Special Time: PRIDE Skills in Action

Overarching goal of Special Time: Follow your child's lead in the play!



Praise

"Great job sharing!"
"Thanks for showing me."



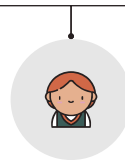
Reflect

Child: I'm making a castle. **Parent:** You're making a castle.



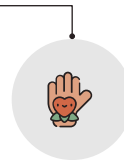
Imitate

Child: Builds with Magnatiles.
Parent: Builds similarly with Magnatiles.



Describe

"You are drawing a purple circle."
"You're making the car go fast!"



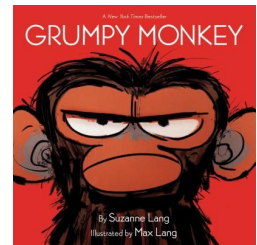
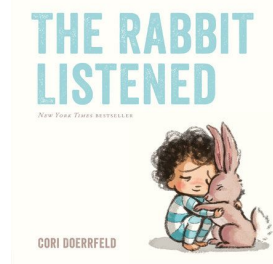
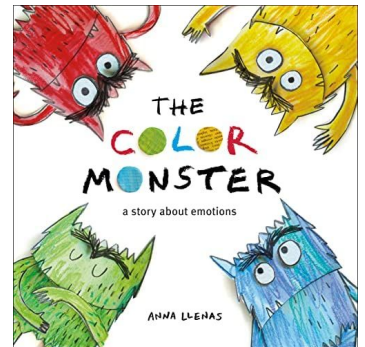
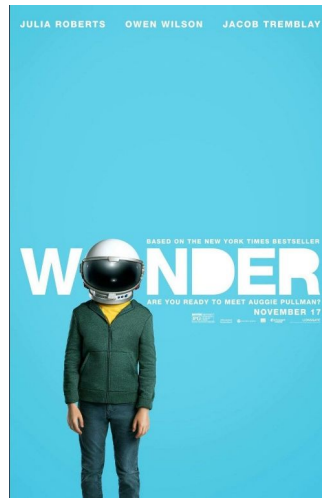
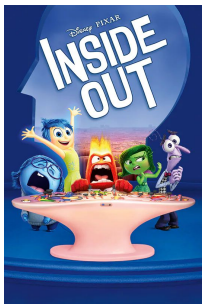
Enjoy

Smiling, laughing, high fiving

Timing In: Labeling and Modeling Emotions



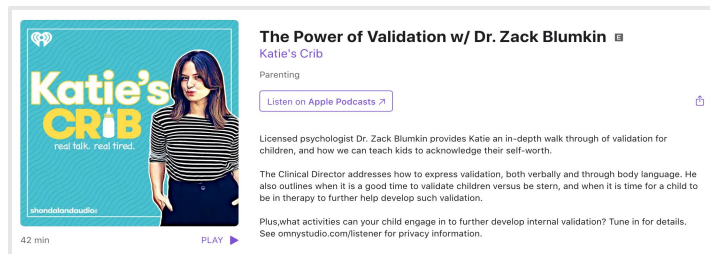
Timing In: Labeling and Modeling Emotions



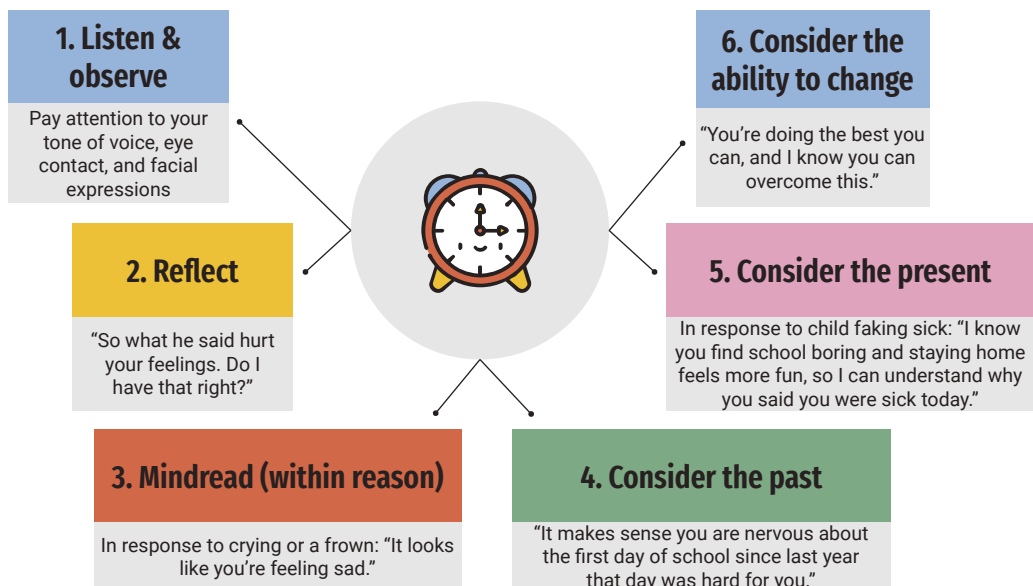
Timing In: Validation

Validation means understanding and accepting your child's thoughts, feelings, and identity

- Validation does *not* mean approval and is not simply praise or empathy towards your child
- Validation includes genuinely listening to and observing your child; reflecting what they've shared in order to show empathic understanding; and making sense of your child's experience based on past learning or current circumstances
- Validation teaches effective communication of emotions, decreases shame, strengthen relationships, and so much more!



Validation in Action



Timing In to Your Older Child

Together time, emotion modeling, and validation remain important for older children and teens!

- Carve out consistent “Special Time” with your middle schooler even if you don’t specifically call it that
 - Use the PRIDE skills in a developmentally appropriate way (e.g., don’t reflect your middle schooler word for word or they’ll likely roll their eyes at you!), and still let them lead the activity and conversation
 - Play board or card games, complete a complex Lego set, or engage in more advanced arts and crafts projects together
- Continue to label and model emotions even if you aren’t reading feelings books together anymore
 - Casually incorporate emotion language into conversation
 - Reduce and label stigma around feelings and mental health as it comes up
- It may be more important than ever to validate and normalize your older child’s thoughts and feelings
 - Hormones, peer pressure, athletic and/or academic competition, and future goals are all at play

Seeking Mental Health Treatment

When?

It may be time to seek therapy when your child is struggling with relationships, academics, or leisure activities AND/OR if you as a parent feel in over your head with their presenting problems, whether they be anxiety-, mood-, or behavior-related.

Who?

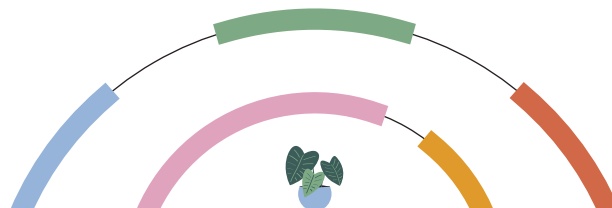
Your child’s pediatrician or school counselor may be helpful starting points. They may suggest psychological testing or therapy and can help you with referrals.

How?

Don’t stigmatize therapy or seeking help! Share with your child that **asking for help is a sign of strength**. We all need a little help sometimes. Seeking help can make life easier, help us feel happier, and support families in getting along better.

What?

Evidence-based treatments (EBTs) are treatments that are backed by scientific research and shown to be effective in reducing clinical symptoms. Common EBTs for early and middle childhood include parent-interaction therapy (PCIT), cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and exposure and response prevention (ERP).



Questions & Discussion

Mental Health

How do you prioritize your mental health as a parent?

Consistency

Are you and your partner consistent in your parenting approaches?

Special Time

Do you foresee any barriers to implementing Special Time?

Modeling

How might you model coping with difficult feelings?



Validation

Do you recognize the difference between validation and problem solving?

Collaboration

How can you work together with school staff to be consistent supports for your child?



Boston Child Study Center

BOSTON · LOS ANGELES · MAINE

Expert Mental Health Treatment, Training & Research



Kaitlyn Wilbur-Smith, Psy.D.

Licensed Clinical Psychologist
Director of Selective Mutism Services

Boston Child Study Center
729 Boylston Street, Fifth Floor
Boston, MA 02116
Direct Phone: 617-356-7509
Main Office: 617-800-9610
Fax: 866-496-3029
Email: KWilbur@BostonChildStudyCenter.com
www.BostonChildStudyCenter.com

References available upon request.
CREDITS: This presentation template was created by [Slidesgo](https://www.slidesgo.com/).