

Supporting Our Kids' Mental Health

SupportLinc Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Penn State Health



Disclaimer

The general views, thoughts and opinions expressed in this presentation are expressly those of the presenter. The presentation is intended to provide general tips, advice and coping skills, and may not entirely pertain to your circumstance or you as an individual in a professional or clinical capacity. For specific advice on your unique situation, please reach out to a licensed financial or clinical professional for a confidential, one-on-one consult. CuraLinc Healthcare and the presenter are not held responsible or liable for any consequences or damages due to an individual taking action based on the information presented herein.

Objectives

This training is designed to help you:

- Recognize signs and symptoms of emotional distress in children
- Learn techniques to support and improve children's mental health
- Discuss best mental health practices

Emotional distress

Preschool, ages 3-5

- Feel helpless and uncertain
- Fear of being separated from parent/caregiver
- Cry and/or scream a lot
- Eat poorly and lose weight
- Return to bedwetting
- Return to using baby talk
- Develop new fears
- Have nightmares
- Recreate trauma through play
- Are not developing to their next growth stage
- Have changes in behavior



Emotional distress

Elementary school, ages 5-11

- Become anxious and fearful
- Worry about their own or others' safety
- Become clingy with a teacher or a parent
- Feel guilt or shame
- Tell others about the traumatic event again and again
- Become upset if they get a small bump or bruise
- Have a hard time concentrating
- Experience numbness
- Have fears that the event will happen again
- Have difficulties sleeping
- Show changes in school performance
- Become easily startled



Emotional distress

Middle school and high school, ages 11-18

- Feel depressed and alone
- Discuss the traumatic events in detail
- Develop eating disorders and self-harming behaviors such as cutting
- Start using or abusing alcohol or drugs
- Become sexually active
- Feel like they're going crazy
- Feel different from everyone else
- Take too many risks
- Have sleep disturbances
- Don't want to go places that remind them of the event
- Say they have no feeling about the event
- Show changes in behavior



Children's mental health



Emotions chart

How many do you feel right now?



How to talk to your child about their mental health

- Make an analogy to a medical problem
- Give them concrete explanations
- Listen to them and validate their experiences
- Be sure they know this is not their fault
- Have frequent, open conversations
- Speak at an appropriate developmental level
- Let them ask you questions
- Include the family
- Discuss self-care



Developmentally appropriate

**Every child is
unique**

**Follow their
lead**

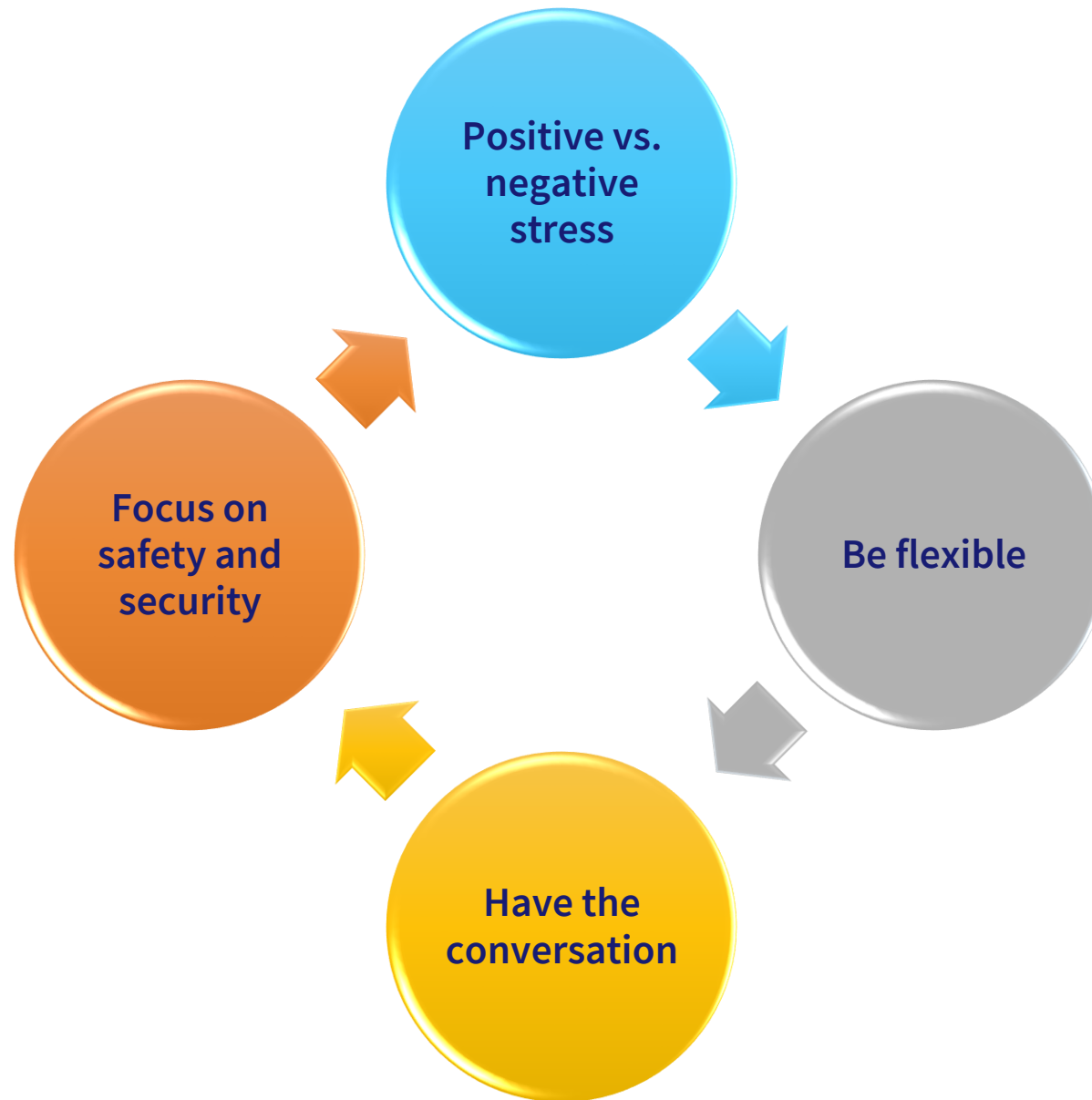
**Model healthy
behavior**

**Have a holistic
approach**

Holistic approach to mental health

- Be intentional
- Allow your child to experience distress and failure
- Let your child be bored
- Provide structure and consistency
- Encourage connections
- Model good self-care and healthy choices
- Counseling/mental health supports

Stress management



Mental health best practices



Healthy family systems

Consistency

Realistic and clear boundaries/rules and roles

Involvement in change

Focused time for connection

Strengths based

“It takes a village”

Interactive toolkits

Mindfulness

www.mindfulness.tools

Practical tools and exercises for incorporating mindfulness into everyday life.

Meditation

www.meditate.tools

Easy-to-use collection of resources that includes guided meditations, tip sheets and more.

Resiliency

www.resiliency.tools

Skill development resources to help you 'bounce back' from challenging situations.

Sleep fitness

www.sleepfitness.tools

Information and resources to help you learn good sleep habits and achieve healthy sleep.

What is SupportLinc?

The SupportLinc Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a health benefit, separate from your medical insurance, offered by your employer to help you manage life's daily challenges.

SupportLinc can refer you to professional counselors, services and resources that will help you and your eligible family members resolve a broad range of personal and work-related concerns.

What services are included?

Work-life benefits



Legal consultation

Free in-person or telephonic consultation with a licensed attorney

No employment law



Dependent care referrals

Expert referrals to child and adult/elder care providers, facilities and other resources



Financial consultation

Expert guidance and consultation from financial professionals



“Convenience” referrals

Guidance and referrals to a variety of daily living resources: home improvement, entertainment services, pet care, auto repair, wellness, travel, handymen, volunteer opportunities etc.



Identity theft consultation

Free consultation with an identity theft recovery professionals

Tailored recovery action plan

Getting started



Call: 1-888-881-LINC (5462)



QR Code:



Visit: www.supportlinc.com



Log in or create account
(code: psh)

SupportLinc

Support for everyday issues. Every day.

Additional resources

Children who have experienced distressing events need to feel safe and loved. However, parents can sometimes misinterpret their child's behavior and end up feeling frustrated or resentful. Your attempts to address troubling behavior may be ineffective, or in some cases, even harmful.

Children can cope more effectively with a distressing event when they feel they understand what is happening and what they can do. Providing basic information may help them cope.

For preschool-aged children, it may be comforting to provide a simple explanation of what happened and how it will affect them (e.g., a tree branch fell on electrical wires and that is why the lights don't work). Let children know there are many people who are working to help them and their community to recover after a disaster (such as repair crews for the electric company, or firefighters, police, paramedics or other emergency personnel). Share steps that are being taken to keep them safe; children will often worry that a crisis will occur again.

Older children will likely want, and benefit from, additional information about the distressing event. No matter what age, start by asking children what they already know and what questions they have and use that as a guide for the conversation.

Help children cope

After a disaster or distressing event, children benefit from adults who can help them learn how to cope effectively. Although it is not useful for adults to appear overwhelmed by the event, it is helpful to share some of their feelings and what they are doing to deal with those feelings. Allow children to "own" their feelings. Let your child know that it is all right to be upset about something bad that happened. Use the conversation to talk about other troubling feelings your child may have. A child who feels afraid is afraid, even if adults think the reason for the fear is unnecessary. If you feel overwhelmed or hopeless, look for some support from other adults before reaching out to your child.

You can take the following actions to help your child after a distressing event:

- Help your child feel safe. One of the most important things parents or caregivers can do is to help their child feel safe.
- Provide reassurance. Reassure children that steps are being taken to keep them safe. This can be done by pointing out things that are in place to keep them safe.
- Restore the child's normal routine. As soon as you can, go back to a normal routine. This means doing things like singing songs if you always sing songs with your child. Or read stories at the time you usually do. Bedtime and mealtime at familiar times are very helpful to children. Children function better when they know what to expect. Keep in mind that you do not want to force children to return to all routines if they are unable to do so because of their distress. Helping children understand and process events is also important.
- Express feelings. Infants and toddlers may express themselves differently. They may cry more. They may be harder to soothe. They may become fussier. Holding and cuddling may soothe your child. Soft music may soothe infants. Toddlers may have more temper tantrums. They may want to cling to you. Preschool and older children may like to draw or tell stories to express their feelings.
- Ask questions. Parents and caregivers should ask children if they have questions or concerns. This helps children know that it is ok to talk. If your child asks questions, allow the child's questions to lead the discussion. If your child does not have questions, do not push. He or she may be more willing to talk later.

Additional resources

- Share information. Explain events as simply and directly as possible. Because every child is different, take cues from your child as to how much information to share. Remember that even young children will hear about major events and that it is best to hear about them from a parent or caregiver and not the media.
- Acknowledge losses. Children are not only trying to deal with the distressing event but with everything else that follows. Allow children to express their regrets over these “secondary losses,” like more stress in the home, tension with friends, trouble at school, moving, less income in the home etc..
- Have fun. Find ways to have fun with your child or to be silly together. If your child likes to play peek-a-boo or play a favorite game, do those things. Laughter can be healing.
- Limit exposure to media coverage of the event. Images of the disaster or crisis on the TV, internet, radio, newspaper and other social media may frighten or stress children more. Avoid or limit children’s exposure to distressing pictures in the media.
- Help your child learn to relax. Encourage your child to practice slow breathing, listen to calming music or say positive things about themselves.
- Be consistent and predictable. Develop a regular routine for meals, play time and bedtime. Prepare your child in advance for changes or new experiences.
- Be patient. Everyone copes differently. Respect each child’s own road of discovery as you help them learn what helps them.
- Allow some control. Reasonable, age-appropriate choices encourage a child or youth’s sense of having control of his or her own life.
- Encourage self-esteem: Positive experiences can help children recover from distressing events and increase resilience. Examples include mastering a new skill; feeling a sense of belonging to a community, group, or cause; setting and achieving goals; and being of service to others.

Seeking treatment

If your child’s symptoms last more than a few weeks or if they are getting worse rather than better, it is time to ask for help. Mental health counseling or therapy by a professional trained to recognize and treat children can help address the root cause of your child’s behavior and promote healing. A therapist or behavioral specialist may be able to help you understand your child and respond more effectively. At times, medications may be necessary to control symptoms and improve your child’s ability to learn new skills.

Additional resources include:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/trauma-and-children-two-to-five-years>

https://www.ecmhc.org/tutorials/trauma/mod3_1.html

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/trauma-and-primary-school-age-children>

<https://childmind.org/article/how-trauma-affects-kids-school/>

<https://www.newportacademy.com/our-approach/teen-trauma/>

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/trauma-and-teenagers-common-reactions>

Moving ahead



What did you get out of today's presentation?

Which concepts are working in your life and why?

Who can be a support for you to make change?

Which concepts are *not* working in your life and why?

What 3 ideas are going to be the most helpful for you?

How can you support someone else with change?

What can you do in the next 24 hours to apply these concepts?

What are your biggest barriers for change?