

HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO LOOK AFTER BODY AND MIND



When it comes to children and mental health, the media is full of stories about **the effects of social media**, the **huge amounts of time dedicated to digital screens** and online networks, and **the damage it can cause even from a very young age**.

Of course, children's mental health is directly affected by their actual immediate domestic environment and their relationships with adults, siblings and others in their life. Challenging and adverse life events can have a serious effect on mental health, and according to children's charity Place2Be in the UK - organisers of Children's Mental Health Week - in their work in schools they see children in every class with diagnosable mental health conditions and many more who are struggling with challenges from bullying to bereavement. Many children don't have the resources or resilience to cope, and the awareness week aims to help parents, carers, teachers and youth workers to best support children.

Mind as well as body

'Healthy: Inside and Out'.

It's been recognised that when we think about being healthy and healthy living, we tend to focus on looking after our bodies - our physical wellbeing - through, say, food, being active and getting enough sleep. However, in order to be healthy overall, the campaign's message is that it's important to look after our minds - our mental wellbeing - too. It may not be obvious that mind and body are so closely linked, so the campaign aims to promote that what we do to improve our physical wellbeing can help our mental wellbeing as well. It can help us feel better in ourselves, focus on what we want to do and deal with difficult times.

The following simple ways may help your child to look after their body and mind:

Share with them how you look after yourself

Chat with your child about what you do to look after your body and mind, from walking the dog to turning your phone off before bed. Sharing the steps you've taken to stay healthy can set a good example for them - but equally, don't be afraid to admit it if you've struggled. It's a valuable message to get across, that it's important to keep trying, even when things are difficult.

Discuss how different things work in different ways: perhaps playing football in the playground makes them excited, or eating fruit gives them energy, or reading a story at bedtime is relaxing? What might they do which would help them look after their mind and body? Drink only one fizzy drink a week? Do star jumps at playtime? Listen to relaxing music before going to sleep? Writing a diary? If it helps, then great - but if not they can always try something else and find out what works best for them.

Praise them as you raise them

Praise your child and other family members for what they do to look after their body and mind - even if it's something small. It can take a little time to settle into a new routine or way of doing things and to be happy to do so. Remember, a little encouragement can go a long way and help them to form new ongoing helpful behaviours and habits. If your child sees healthy living in a positive light, they're more likely to carry on doing these things throughout life.

Remind them that nobody's perfect

Whether it be through classmates gossiping in messaging apps, or celebrities sharing images through their social media profiles, it can be easy for children to feel that they are not the perfect shape or height or are in some way not quite as perfect or otherwise healthy as they would like to be. Remind your child that there's no such thing as a perfect body or mind; that everyone's body and mind is different - and that this is something to celebrate.

Stay connected with them and have fun

We use that word - connected - so much when we talk about being online with Internet access. But you and your kids should aim to be connected offline too. Family life can be very busy and stressful at times, so think about and plan something you can do regularly with your child that will keep you well connected and having fun together. It could be cooking a meal together, or just making time to a family dinner

(without devices on the table). Or if you're heading outside, then going for a walk - and perhaps a talk - together can be a great way to stay connected.