



WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

ESS1503.8S | Eighth Grade

Series III

These parenting guides are a gift to you from the Sioux Empire United Way. They were adapted and written by the South Dakota State Cooperative Extension Service. We hope the information is helpful and gives you additional resources to assist in your efforts to raise healthy and successful children. If you need additional resources for your family, you can call the HELP!Line by dialing 211 or 334-6646. This is a United Way partner program that connects you to all available services for your family.

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What is Emotional Wellness?

As you read the heading on this newsletter, you may have asked yourself, “What is emotional wellness, and how does it relate to my child’s development?”

Emotional wellness, or social-emotional wellness, is a developmental process. In the same manner that your child develops physically and intellectually, he or she also develops emotionally. Children need to develop emotional and social competencies in order to do such things as

- recognize and manage emotions;
- develop caring and concern for others;
- establish positive relationships;
- make responsible decisions; and
- handle changing situations.

As a parent, you have an active role in contributing to your child’s emotional wellness. According to researchers, in order for children to best develop these abilities, children need to “experience safe, nurturing and well-managed environments where they feel valued and respected; they need meaningful interactions with

socially and emotionally competent people; and they need positive and specific guidance” (www.caselorg/basics/definition.php).

The articles in the Wings for Life series pertain to your children’s experiences with other children, competition, the use of free time, daily schedules, money, family togetherness, and many more challenges. The information in each article is intended to help you help your child’s social-emotional learning. Key skills that are addressed in the Wings for Life series include:

- Self-awareness—recognizing feelings and managing anger.
- Understanding others—developing empathy and taking the perspective of others.
- Making responsible decisions and following through—this includes considering the long-term consequences of one’s actions for oneself and others.
- Understanding oneself—handling emotions, setting goals, and dealing with obstacles.
- Building healthy relationships—saying “no” to negative peer pressure and working to resolve conflicts.

Nurturing your child’s emotional wellness will lead to life-long emotional health:

- If a child is able to calm himself when he is angry, he can avoid damaging important personal relationships with others.
- If a child is able to initiate and maintain friendships, she develops both socially and emotionally.
- If a child is able to resolve relationship conflicts respectfully, he will sustain positive personal and professional relationships throughout life.
- If a child is able to make ethical choices, she builds character and her commitment to fairness grows stronger.
- If a child is able to maintain a positive attitude, he handles adversity and challenges in a good way and commits to making the world a better place for himself and others.

This is an informational fact sheet. The purpose of the publication is to provide basic information. It is not intended to be used for assessment or treatment of mental health. If you suspect your child or teen needs help in the emotional wellness and mental health areas, please contact a mental health professional immediately. The term “parent” is used throughout this newsletter. It is intended to encompass guardians and primary caregivers as well.



South Dakota
Cooperative Extension Service



Community Service is More Than Good Deeds

As your child becomes involved in school clubs or youth organizations, she will almost certainly be asked to participate in a community service project. Community service projects are generally unique to the community because they fulfill an unmet need in the community, and each community is different. Common service projects include food collections, visiting the elderly, reading to younger children, picking up litter, or making/delivering gift baskets for needy families.

Service learning is a more specific type of community involvement. It is a way of teaching youth about their communities by linking volunteer service to an educational process. In service learning projects, youth take on real issues such as pollution, literacy, hunger, or prejudice. Youth learn about needs in their community, research solutions to the problems, and decide on a plan of action to bring about change. Youth interact with community leaders and use what they have learned to solve real-life problems. They become contributing citizens through the service they perform, learning about civic engagement and democracy throughout the process.

Encourage your child to participate in service learning projects for the many benefits that she may gain. Research indicates that youth who take part in service learning benefit in many ways. A child who takes part in service learning may:

- improve in their schoolwork and score higher on state tests on basic skills;
- develop vocational skills and learn about careers;
- develop a better attitude toward work;
- improve their problem-solving skills;
- increase proficiency in language and reading;
- develop a strong sense of ethics and civic responsibility and increase their understanding of how government works;
- increase communication, decision-making, and leadership skills;
- be more likely to treat others kindly, help others, and care about doing their best;
- have a higher level of self-esteem.

If you are involved in your teen's service learning project, there are a few essential guidelines for a successful project:

- Involve youth throughout the planning process.
- Make a link between learning and service.
- Focus on the new skills to be learned.
- Let youth experiment and try out new roles.
- Make a meaningful contribution to the community.
- Build unity among participants to help them function better as a team.

- View young people as a resource.

Finally, bring the project full circle by having youth reflect on and evaluate their experiences. Reflection brings meaning to the process and creates a link to other types of learning. Reflection might include the following questions:

- What specifically was accomplished? What part(s) were successful?
- What were some of your thoughts and feelings as you carried out the project?
- What did you learn about yourself? About others?
- Did you change your attitudes about anything? If so, explain how you changed.
- How can you use what you learned in other settings, such as in your home, school or community?

“By teaching young people the joys of service to others, we make good citizenship a vital, transforming and continuing aspect of our national character.”

—Secretary of State Colin Powell

When Exercise Can Be Too Much

Did you ever think you would have to worry about your teenager exercising too much? Although national data indicates that most teens don't exercise enough, some teens exercise to the extreme. The reasons for this behavior may be an issue of concern for your child's emotional wellness. Some reasons for a teen to exercise excessively:

- Fervent desire to be competitive in one or more sports. Some sports place undue emphasis on weight control, especially wrestling and gymnastics.
- Influence of peers and media messages about body image (very thin or very muscular bodies)
- In addition to unhealthy eating, excessive exercise may be used to control weight, especially among young women.
- In the extreme, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)



Participation in sports is an excellent activity for most teens. They experience the camaraderie of being on a team and learn physical coordination and endurance. If it seems that exercise and sports participation are overshadowing every other part of your teen's life, you may want to discuss balance with your teen. A healthy lifestyle includes school, social time, and family time, as well as sports.

A special concern related to sports is that teens may be tempted to exercise too much when recovering from an injury. The desire to participate or the fear of losing a starting position are very strong. By continuing to play,

your teen may be at risk of reinjuring himself, perhaps more seriously than the first time. Insist on a full recovery before resuming participation in the sport. Seek advice from a doctor, physical therapist, coach, or team trainer before your teen returns to the sport or other physical activity.

Excessive exercise may be an effort to lose weight. During the rapid physical growth that occurs during the teen years, your teen needs to consume sufficient calories to ensure proper physical growth and development. When your child burns too many calories for the purpose of losing weight, you need to be alert to the signs of an eating disorder. If your child's weight loss seems too rapid or too great, talk to your family doctor or the school nurse.

Lifting weights is a form of exercise known as strength training. Many teenagers, especially boys, lift weights to develop muscular physiques like actors or models in the media. Teens lift weight to develop muscle and to challenge themselves, but they may also be competing with friends or teammates to see who can lift the most weight. If teens do not have proper guidance on either the proper way to lift or how to gradually increase weight training, they can experience injuries. Strains or permanent damage to bones, joints, and tendons may occur while your teen is still growing and developing.

The recommendation for a healthy teenager is to get 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Teens can do this safely by following a well-balanced exercise plan that includes aerobic exercise, strength training, and flexibility training. Teenagers will experience many benefits from appropriate exercise:

- Healthy physical growth and development
- Increased positive self-concept
- Positive attitude and increased mental alertness
- Sleep better
- Enhanced physical appearance
- Developing lifelong habits that help a person age well over the life span

Help your teen live a healthier lifestyle. Take the time to model healthy and safe physical activity for your teen. Participate in exercise with your teen to build a closer relationship.

If you are worried about your teenager and feel that your child is overly anxious or depressed, please contact your physician, school counselor, or local mental health professional.

What is OCD?

Tom is a pretty intelligent person. He gets good grades

in school and has several friends. He enjoys going places with his family and loves to collect sports cards. To most people, things seem pretty normal with him. Tom seems to have everything he needs and more. The two main questions his friends have are 1) "What makes Tom such a worrier?" and 2) "Why does Tom always act like he might get contaminated from things he touches?" The answer to both questions is: Tom is a person who struggles with obsessive-compulsive disorder, otherwise known as OCD.

OCD is an anxiety disorder that affects at least 3.3 million Americans and usually begins during childhood. It occurs at equal rates between males and females, and it often manifests itself through persistent unwanted thoughts that are called obsessions. And these obsessions lead to recurring actions called compulsions.

OCD can sometimes exist with depression, eating disorders, substance abuse disorders, personality disorders, or attention-deficit disorder. Coexisting disorders like these can make it more difficult for mental health professionals to both diagnose and treat OCD. Unfortunately, for a person like Alex doing rituals is often unreasonable and may only give temporary relief. By not performing these rituals, a person can become more worried and increase the anxiety they already have.

Having OCD brings up persistent fears in a person that harm might come to themselves or someone they care about. Also, unreasonable thoughts about becoming contaminated, or having an urgent and excessive need to do things perfectly, can be frustrating and affect their schoolwork. These thoughts can be unpleasant and intrusive. Some of the repetitive thoughts in people with OCD lead to behaviors such as repetitive hand washing, checking, counting, cleaning, repeating certain phrases, list making, and hoarding things. Performing rituals may give some relief to the person; however, the relief is often only short lived.

Despite many challenges, people with OCD can lead very productive lives. Although some may think that people who are perfectionists have OCD, it may not be the case, as OCD is a specific, well-defined condition. Mental health professionals will normally diagnose and treat OCD.

Fortunately, there is help available for people such as Tom who struggle with OCD. Courtesy of new research into treating OCD symptoms, OCD sufferers can lead active and normal lives. Most often, OCD responds best to treatment with medications or psychotherapy.

Internet Safety

The Internet is a wonderful tool and good entertainment for youth and adults. However, there is also a downside to Internet use. Constant computer use may limit your child's social interactions and even lead to harmful consequences, such as running into online predators or cyberbullies. Cyberbullying is any cyber communication or publication posted or sent by a minor online that is intended to frighten, embarrass, harass, or otherwise target another minor. Most cyberbullying typically involves preteens and young teens and usually ends around 14 years of age. After 14, cyberbullying tends to become sexual harassment or hacking attacks. Sometimes youth are reluctant to tell adults what is happening online or through their cell phone because they are emotionally traumatized, think it is their fault, fear greater retribution, or fear their online activities or use of a cell phone will be restricted by their parents.

You need to make it your business to know what your child is doing online. To stay involved in your child's communication behavior, consider the following precautions:

- Keep computers with Internet access in the shared spaces in your home, not in your child's bedroom.
- Educate your child about the potential dangers of online communication and help her to role-play effective ways to respond to cyberbullying. Remind your child to be polite to others online, just as she would be offline. If someone treats your child rudely or in a mean way, don't respond. Online bullies are just like offline bullies: they want others to respond.
- Encourage your child to report incidents of cyberbullying to adults and reinforce your child's beliefs that action will be taken in response to the event.
- Set a family Internet policy. Define the ground rules for use (e.g., scheduled times, permissible websites, online communication only with familiar peers).
- Urge your child to be involved in face-to-face activities as alternatives to interaction on the Internet. Youth who are vulnerable, lonely, and have low self-esteem are the most-likely candidates for excessive Internet use, which increases their risk of exposure to cyberbullying.
- Remind your child to never give out or share personal information, including his or her name, the names of friends and family, addresses, phone

numbers, or any other personal information (e.g., photos).

- Get access to parental blocking-type software that protects your child from exploring websites that you find inappropriate.
- Periodically check your child's computer-use history, including viewing files, browser history, and Internet-use history.

Help your child explore the world of possibilities available through the Internet, but also help make your child a savvy consumer of online tools and resources.

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Resources

Collaboration for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. www.casel.org.

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/ocd.cfm>.

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