



Connection is Vital for Your Child's Mental Health

Positive, healthy relationships play a key role in mental health and are especially important as children, adolescents, and teens develop. In this issue of Every Family School Edition, we invite you to think about how your child is connected to the people around him or her, how you can encourage meaningful connections, and how you can ease your child out of the clutches of technology if its use is out of balance.

TAKE STOCK OF YOUR CHILD'S WEEK

Over the course of an average week, notice when your child is engaged meaningfully with family, friends, and teammates. How often is your child connected with others and experiencing relationships? Learning how to form and maintain relationships is an important part of childhood. Children experience what it feels like to be in different types of relationships and begin to make distinctions between ones that are safe and supportive, and those that are dangerous or self-serving. The inevitable ebb and flow of relationships also gives children opportunities to practice managing conflict and heartache and builds coping skills.

ENCOURAGE CONNECTIONS WITH PEERS

Kids don't need many friends, but they will feel more content if they have at least one. They need to feel connected to others and part of something that has value. If they are having trouble making friends on their own, organized activities, when done in a balanced way, can hold a special power of belonging.



CREATE "TINY TIMES" WITH YOUR CHILD

The reality of today's parenting is that parents are exhausted, and spending meaningful time with children takes effort and commitment. When large amounts of time are difficult, create tiny times together: 10 minutes to chat when you first arrive home; 10 minutes to play hide-and-seek before you do the dishes; 15 minutes at bedtime to talk about the day. Most children report that the time right before you say goodnight is when they are most likely to share a worry or something they are proud of. Offer moments of connection to your child. They will accumulate and help him or her feel important and secure. When children feel this way, they are also less likely to abuse substances or be a target for harassment or bullying.

continued on back



WHAT DO WE DO?

We work every day to strengthen lives.

MANAGE TECH ADDICTION

The kind of connection that is most valuable to children is human connection. If you are worried that your child is spending too much time on technology, you are wise to consider how to intervene. Kids who spend a lot of time on technology often exhibit symptoms of depression. **Technology has magical powers for kids.** It allows them to hit pause on whatever they are feeling and instantly transport themselves to a place where they feel relaxed. Our job as adults is to help children build their inner resources, so try to downshift time on technology slowly and encourage alternative options to achieve balanced use.



Visit our Teen Center

Our West Hartford Teen Center is a safe, supervised, substance-free drop-in center open to West Hartford teens in grades 9-12. Join us on Mondays and Fridays from 2:30-5:00 p.m. and Wednesdays from 1:00-3:30 p.m. for basketball, billiards, Xbox, Ping-Pong, and creative arts. Teen Night is held one Friday per month from 7:00-10:00 p.m.



Kids in Divorce & Separation (K.I.D.S.)

We run support groups for children who are experiencing a separation due to divorce, military service, incarceration, or the death of a loved one. Groups are held in nearly all West Hartford elementary schools. Contact us to learn more.



OPIOID ADDICTION

Opioid addiction is an epidemic, and **IT CAN AFFECT YOUR CHILD.** When talking about opioids, send a clear message:

“If a prescription is not yours and was not given to you by your doctor, don’t take it. Pills can be highly addicting, and if abused, are often the first step in a heroin addiction. Heroin is a deadly drug and you should never, ever try it—not even once.”

If you suspect your child is abusing pills, act fast. **DO NOT DELAY.** If you need a first step, we can help. Our three counseling centers, located in West Hartford, Avon, and Rockville, are supported by a therapy team that includes a child psychiatrist. We accept private insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid.

