

Starting the Conversation: A Mental Health Workshop for Parents

Merrick UFSD
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Participants will gain:

- An understanding of how thoughts, feelings, and actions are all related and how this applies to children.
- Actionable strategies for supporting children with mental health concerns.
- Techniques and approaches in order to prepare yourself in having hard conversations with your child.
- Language and responses to use to promote a healthy dialogue between yourself and your child about mental health, self-harm, and suicide.
- Knowledge of the steps to take should your child or their friend discloses thoughts of self-harm or suicide.



Youth Mental Health by the Numbers

1 in 5 students

**Ages 3 to 17 experience mental
and neurological disorder in
any given year.**

U.S. Centers for Disease Control, 2018

Why do we talk about mental health?



- Mentally healthy children are more successful in school and life.
- Research demonstrates that students who receive social-emotional and mental health support achieve better academically.
- Mental health includes social, emotional, and behavioral health and the ability to cope with life's challenges.
- Left unmet, mental health problems are linked to negative concerns such as academic and behavior problems, dropping out, and delinquency. (NASP, 2016)

Overview of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

Stress-

Our responses to: change, difficult situations, and/or threatening situations.

Anxiety-

A general term for severe disorders that cause nervousness, fear, apprehension, and worrying. These disorders affect how we feel behave and can cause physical symptoms. Mild anxiety is vague and unsettling, while severe anxiety can seriously affect day-to-day living.

Depression-

A mood disorder characterized by low mood, feelings of sadness, and a general loss of interest in things.



Signs/Symptoms

Physical	Emotional	Cognitive	Behavior
Sleep	Angry/ Irritable	Difficulty Concentrating	Avoidance/Escape
Appetite	Worried/ Nervous	Negative Self-Talk	Reassurance Seeking
Energy	Discouraged	Overly Critical	Impulsivity
Somatic Complaints	Sad/Loneliness	Catastrophizing	Lashing Out
Physiological	Apathy	Pessimistic Views	Isolation

Children living in a Changing World

COVID-19

**Social Media
Use**

“FOMO”

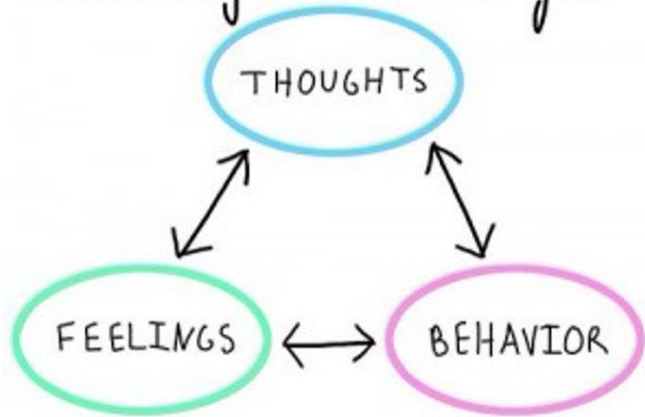
Additional Stressors:

- ✓ School Performance
- ✓ Peer Pressure
- ✓ Family issues/expectations
- ✓ Death of loved one/pet
- ✓ Loss of a friend
- ✓ Move to a new home
- ✓ Media
- ✓ Bullying
- ✓ Family, community, national violence
- ✓ Childhood abuse
- ✓ Injuries or severe physical illness
- ✓ Appearance
- ✓ Finances



The Magic Triangle (Cognition)

The Cognitive Triangle



THE MAGIC TRIANGLE



©The Responsive Counselor

Social Media and Thoughts



Behaviors

Checks account more frequently for status updates, compares own status to friends, more frequent posts, etc.

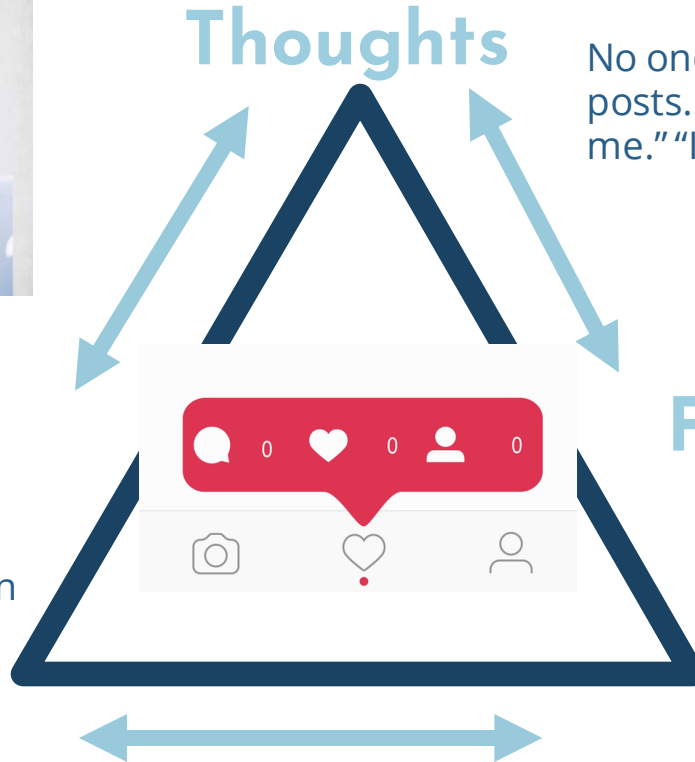
Thoughts

No one has "liked" my posts... nobody likes me." "I am a loser"



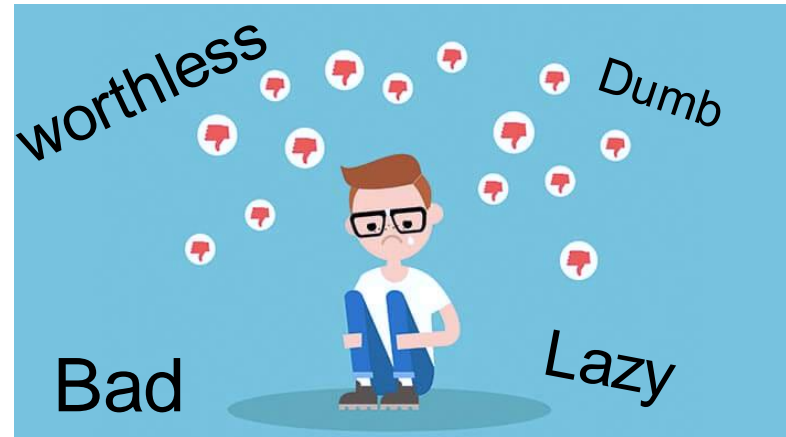
Feelings

Worthless, upset, afraid, angry at self, lonely, depressed, anxious



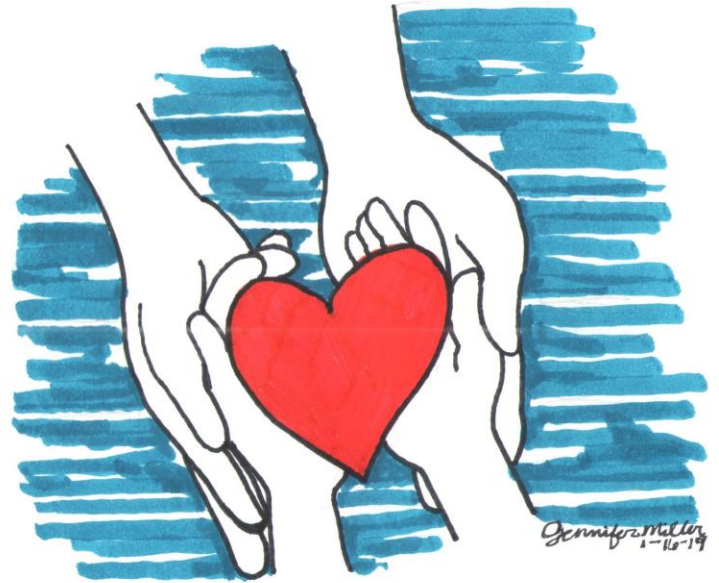
When Negative Thoughts Take Over

- Negative thoughts can become negative beliefs and views.
- Children are not always able to process and reflect on how they feel and tend to feel guilty about it.
- Hopelessness leads to bigger concerns.



Supporting Your Child's Mental Health Needs

- Cultivate a positive, safe environment- foster open communication
- Create connections and sense of belonging
- Promote resilience
- Encourage physical health
- Model/Share coping mechanisms
- Limit and monitor screen time
- Nurture a growth mindset



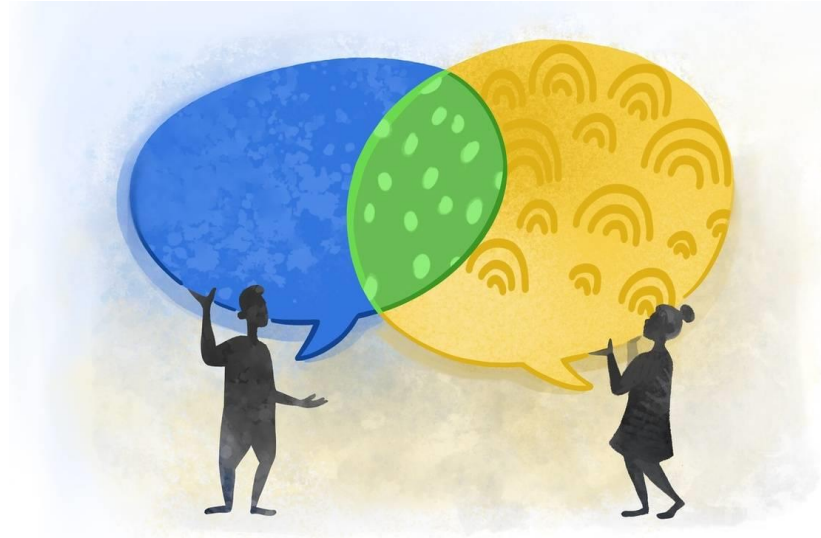
Parent Response



- Using “I” language to convey concern
- Listen to their thoughts and fears without providing a solution
- Put an emphasis on building a connection and collaboration, rather than on the behavior
- Make eye contact
- Speak in calm and comforting tones
- Offer reassurance and hope
- Listen to their story
- Validate their feelings
- Avoid putting “into perspective”

Setting the Stage

- Have frequent but small conversations
- Check-in with each other
- If at first you don't succeed, ask again... later.
- Try text check-ins
- Talk together during a car ride or walk, while making a craft, or passing the ball
- Using books to facilitate conversations
- Make the experience distant by disclosing some of your difficulties or making up scenarios




Listen with an open mind

Encourage action and offer support

- “How can I help?”
- “What would help take the pressure off?”
- “What do you enjoy doing? Making the time for that can really help.”
- “Let’s see if we can find someone who might be able to help.”

Be available to check in





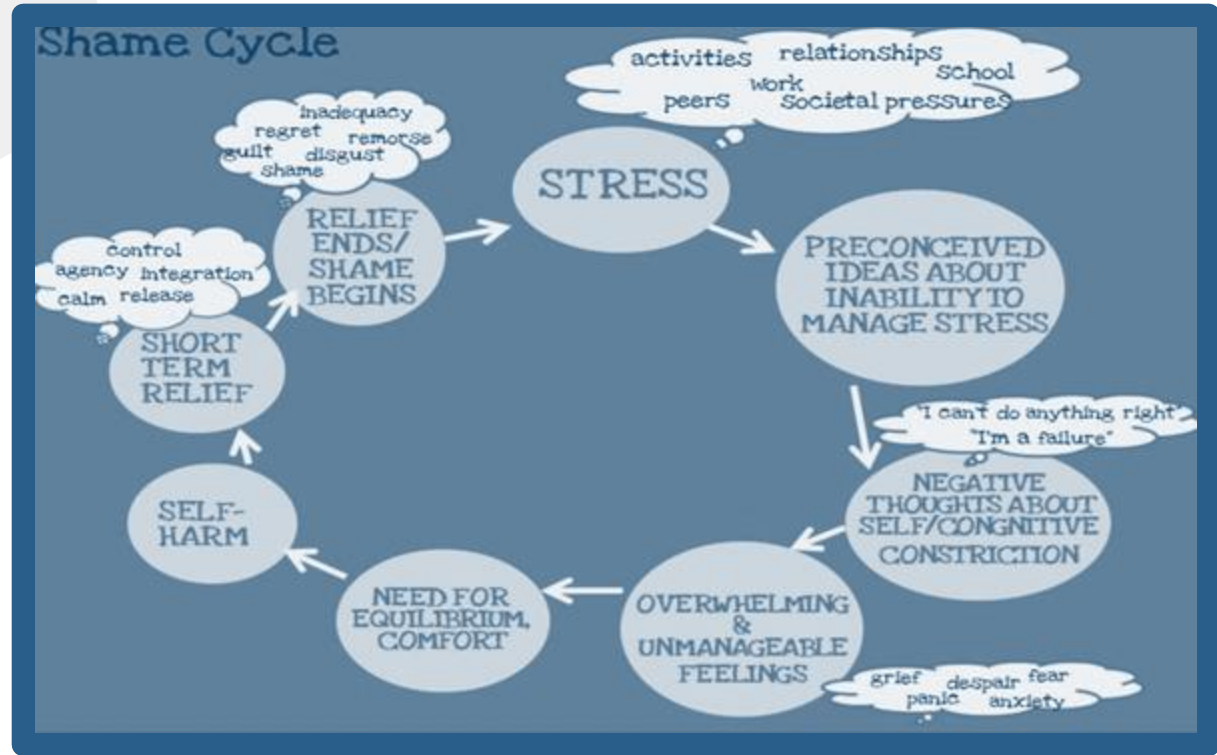
**Sometimes we need
to have an even
bigger conversation...**

Self-Harm

- Majority of self harm occurs between 11-25 years old.
- Why do youth self harm?
 - Self-regulation due to poor problem solving.
- Types: cutting the skin, burning the skin, using objects to inflict pain, punching your own body, hair pulling, interfering with wound healing, ingesting toxic substances or objects, misusing alcohol or drugs, eating disorders (anorexia nervosa or bulimia).



Shame Cycle



Suicide

Myths:

- Suicides happen without warning
- Asking questions or talking about suicide with children and adolescents will increase the probability that suicide will occur.
- Parents/Caregivers are cognizant of their child's suicidal behavior

Facts:

- Most youth who attempt or die by suicide have communicated their distress or plans to at least one other person. These communications are not always direct, so it is important to know some of the key warning signs of suicide.
- Research suggests that youth who are able to openly and candidly discuss the topic of suicide with trusted adults typically have more beneficial outcomes
- One study indicated that 86% of parents were unaware of their child's suicidal ideation, behavior, and attempts.

• When to Seek Help?

- If you feel as though your child is suffering from more than day-to-day stressors
- Your child is withdrawing from friends, family, and activities they used to love.
- Your child's behaviors are interfering with life activities
- Your child is causing significant/repeated disruptions in the home and/or classroom.
- If you notice the warning signs listed in the previous slides consistently (consider the length of time, frequency, and intensity)
- You discover your child made a non-lethal attempt (e.g., cutting, taking pills, alcohol use, researching suicide on the internet).
- Your child is making suicidal threats/threatening others
- If you are unsure of if your child needs to speak to a professional, it is better to ask for help and not need it, than not ask at all



What if my child is having thoughts of suicide or self-harm?

STEP

1

Stay
Calm

STEP

2

Thank them
for having
the courage
to tell you

STEP

3

Reassure
them that
you are
going to
help them
through this

STEP

4

Reduce
immediate
stressors

STEP

5

Remove or
secure
lethal
means in
your home

STEP

6

Connect to
Care

• What to listen for:

“I’m kind of numb”

“I have BAD emotions”

“I feel so alone”

“I hate myself and I wish I was different”

“I have things repeating in my head over and over”

“No one wants to be near me”

“Who cares what I do?”

“There is no point in trying”



Prevention: Suggestions for Youth

- Do not be afraid to talk to your friend.
- Know the warning signs.
- Make no deals to keep anything confidential
- Tell an adult immediately no matter what is said.
- "It's better to lose a friend for a minute rather than to lose a friend for a lifetime."



A.C.T. :
Acknowledge
Care
Tell a Trusted Adult



Where To Get Help?

Reach out to your school's Mental Health Team

Birch Mental Health Team

Maria Petrolekas- School Psychologist

Julia DiGiacomo- Social Worker

Karen Alaimo- District School Counselor



Outside Supports

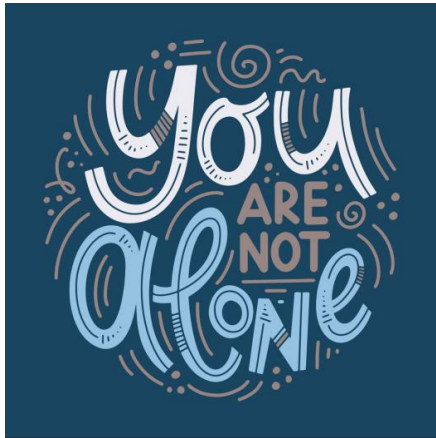
Long Island Crisis Center- 516-679-1111

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK

Nassau County Child Mobile Crisis: 516- 227-8255

Cohen Children's Pediatric Behavioral Health Urgent
Care: 718-470-3148

911 (for immediate danger)





“When little people are overwhelmed by BIG emotions, it’s our job to share our calm. Not join in their chaos.”

–**L.R. Knost**

References

More Than Sad, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
<https://afsp.org/more-than-sad#parents>

Understanding Self Injury, Laura Campbell, Long Island Crisis Center
<https://longislandcrisiscenter.org>

Supporting Children's Mental Health: Tips for Parents and Educators
[Nasponline.org](https://nasponline.org)

How Using Social Media Affects Teenagers, Rachel Ehmke, Child Mind Institute
<https://childmind.org/article/how-using-social-media-affects-teenagers/>



Thank You