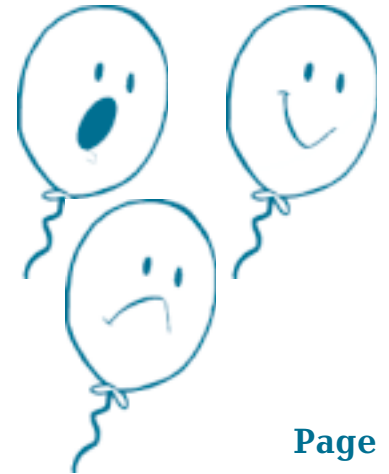


CHAPTER 6
**About
Mental Health**



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Taking care of our mental health is just as important as taking care of our physical health.

What is mental health and why is it important?

Mental health is how we feel, think, and act. Mental health is:

- how we see ourselves and others.
- how we look at issues and make choices.
- how we relate to each other.
- how we go about our daily lives.

Mental health is just as important as physical health. Our minds and our bodies work together. Our mental health affects our physical health. And our physical health affects our mental health. Based on how we feel, think, and act, our mental health can be good, not so good, or poor.

All people, including children, adolescents, and adults, may have issues to deal with that can affect our mental health. It *does not* mean we are crazy. It *does* mean that we may need some extra help to deal with our issues.

HIV can put children at higher risk of having problems with the way they feel, think, and act.

How will I know if my child needs mental health care?

Any child with a life-long health condition is at higher risk for having problems with the way he/she feels, thinks, and acts. There are many reasons why children with **HIV** may need mental health care. Help may be needed to deal with HIV

issues or deal with issues that can affect any child. Some reasons include:

- the stress of having HIV and dealing with loss, such as:
 - not being able to do all the things other children do.
 - taking medicine.
 - going to doctor and clinic visits.
 - worrying about a parent who has HIV.
- the death of a parent, brother or sister.
- living with someone who is ill.
- divorce.
- domestic violence.
- substance abuse.
- homelessness.
- being removed from home and placed in foster care.

Sometimes it is not easy to decide if your child needs mental health care. Some children are able to talk about their concerns, while others cannot. Some children show signs of stress, while others do not.

To help you decide if your child needs mental health care, think about any changes in your child's behavior or routine and get advice from professionals.



Your child may not be able to tell you how he/she is feeling or why he/she is having problems.

Behavior and routine

Whenever there is a change in how your child feels, thinks, or acts, do not assume your child is going through a phase. If your child is not able to tell you how he/she is feeling, you may be able to get clues from changes in his/her behavior or routine. These clues may give you a chance to talk with your child about what you have noticed.

These changes may include:

- mood changes (feeling sad, quick to anger, trouble getting along with others).
- acting out or being aggressive toward self or others (hitting, fighting, being disruptive).
- less interest or change in activities (hobbies, sports, or social activities).
- negative comments or actions toward himself/herself ("I'm stupid," "I'm ugly," "I hate myself," head banging, or frequent injuries).
- change in school performance (trouble thinking, trouble paying attention, lower test scores or grades).
- change in sleep patterns (sleeping too much, not able to go to sleep or stay asleep).
- change in eating (eating too much, not able to eat, gaining weight or losing weight).
- change in energy level (very tired, restless).

Notice if there are changes in your child's behavior or routine.

Special Note for Foster Parents:

If there is a worrisome change in your foster child's behavior or routine, tell your caseworker. If you do not feel comfortable talking with your foster child about the change in his/her behavior or routine, ask your caseworker for help.

Professional advice

While you know your child best, it is also important to get advice from professionals. You can get advice from people who have experience working with children. Your child's health care providers, day care provider, or teachers can help you decide if your child needs mental health care.

If you think your child has a problem with the way he/she feels, thinks or acts, it is important to get the help of a **mental health professional**.



Your child's need for mental health care does not mean you are a bad parent.

Even though you know your child best, your child's health care providers, day care provider, or teachers may also help you decide if your child needs mental health care.

Who can provide mental health care for my child?

Talk with your child's doctor. Tell him/her what your child is doing that worries you. Share with the doctor any information you may have from your child's day care staff or teachers. The doctor will assess your child's mental health and may recommend a **mental health professional**. Based on your child's needs, the doctor may recommend that your child see a **psychiatrist** (sī kī' a trist.), **psychologist** (sī kol' ō jist), **social worker**, or **behavior therapist**.

What does a mental health professional do?

A **mental health professional** will work with your child, you, your family, and other professionals to help improve your child's mental health.

Evaluating your child

The **mental health professional** will evaluate your child's mental health. You will be asked about your child's family history and development. You will also be asked to describe your child's behavior, feelings, and relationships with other children and adults. It may be helpful for you to bring your child's report cards or examples of school work to the appointment. Depending on your child's age, the mental health professional may spend time alone with your child, playing, drawing, or talking. Conversations between the mental health professional and your child will be private. However, the mental health professional will tell you if your child is at risk of harming himself/herself or others.

After your child is evaluated, a treatment plan will be developed.

Developing a plan

After evaluating your child, the **mental health professional** will explain the kind of problems he/she thinks your child has. You and your child (if old enough) can ask questions and work with the mental health professional to help develop a plan for working on the problems.

Special Note for Foster Parents:

Your caseworker must be involved in your foster child's mental health evaluation and treatment plan.

Working with your child and your family

The **mental health professional** will work with your child, you, and the rest of your family.

Services for your child may include:

- play therapy.
- art therapy.
- music therapy.
- individual therapy.
- group therapy.
- support groups.
- medication therapy. Your child may need to take medication to help control his/her behavior. However, medication should never be the only treatment or the main treatment.

Services for you and the other family members may include:

- family support services.
- behavior management techniques.
- family therapy.

Part of your child's treatment plan may include play therapy, individual therapy, and support group therapy.

Your family should be part of your child's treatment plan.

For example, a behavior management program might be suggested if your child is very disruptive and has placed a severe strain on the family.

Working with your child's other providers

The **mental health professional** may also work with your child's doctor. Depending on the treatment plan, the mental health professional may also work with your child's school teachers or day care staff. For example, a classroom with fewer students might be suggested for a child whose learning or emotional needs cannot be met in a regular classroom.

Where can my child get mental health care and how do I pay for it?

Your child may get his/her mental health care from a **mental health professional** in a private office, clinic, or in the place where your child gets his/her medical care. **ADAP Plus, Child Health Plus, Family Health Plus**, most health insurance plans, and **Medicaid** will pay for mental health care for a child with **HIV**. You can call:



ADAP Plus
1-800-542-2437



Child Health Plus
1-800-698-4543



Family Health Plus
1-877-934-7587

Special Note for Foster Parents:

Your caseworker will tell you where to get mental health care for your foster child and how to pay for services.

What can I do to improve my child's mental health?

The most important thing you can do to develop good mental health in your infant, child, or adolescent is to give the loving care and support your child needs.

- Give your baby loving, consistent care so that he/she develops a strong bond with you and other close caregivers. This will help your baby develop basic trust.
- Give your toddler a chance to explore and learn, but also set limits on his/her behavior. This will give your child a sense of security and structure.
- Encourage and praise your child for working hard and doing his/her best in school, sports, or activities. This will help your child build self-esteem and confidence while forming good relationships with teachers and other children.

Give your child lots of love and support.



Teens need as much praise as younger children.

- Make time to talk *with* your teen and be a good listener. Let your teen know that no matter what, you will be there for him/her. Talk with your teen about his/her future. With your support, give your teen the chance to make some decisions. This will help your teen become independent and make good choices about his/her future.

(See **Helping My Adolescent Deal with HIV**, How can I help my teen get through these difficult years? page 8–5, How do I talk to my teen? page 8–8 and How can I tell if my teen is depressed? page 8–38.)

Treat your child as normally as possible.

Help build your child's self-esteem.

Even a very young baby can pick up clues from his/her parents. If you are worried or upset, your child will sense your feelings and become sad or anxious. If your child is small for his/her age or sick much of the time, try not to treat him/her as a younger or weaker child. This can cause your child to have low self-esteem by thinking that he/she cannot do the things other children can do.

Give your child a chance to do well at the tasks other children the same age can do. Give your child small jobs to do around the house, like helping wash dishes or picking up toys. This will help your child feel normal and feel good about himself/herself. This will also let your child know you expect him/her to do things like other members of the family.

It is important to teach your child how to behave, how to respect himself/herself, and how to respect others. This is especially true for children who have to learn how to handle private information. Your child learns from you and other people in his/her life. Family members living in your home

All children, including those with HIV, need rules.

and outside your home, neighbors, teachers, and others are role models for your child. You are probably the most important person in your child's life. Do your best to be a good role model, and help others in your child's life to be good role models, as well.

(See **Living with HIV**, How can I teach my children to know when it is OK to share private information? page 5–15, How do I set up and keep routines and family rules for my child with HIV and my other children? page 5–18.)

