

FAMILY WELLNESS

Protecting Parental Mental Health

- Parents and mental health
- How parental mental health impacts children
- Resources for support



How does parenthood impact mental health? Considering the current mental health climate.

Mental health conditions are the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, affecting 1 in 5 women and childbearing people (MMHLA 2021). Similarly, psychologists estimate that as much as 25% of fathers experience some level of depression in the year following the birth of a child. Even past the first year, parents experience a higher rate of mental health challenges than the general public.

Parenthood brings many new challenges, including new financial needs, strains on relationships with

spouses or partners, lack of sleep, and loss of previous "free time." These challenges quickly create demands on mental health, which can leave parents either feeling that impact or searching for support.

All of these factors can leave parents experiencing mental health challenges but also create barriers for parents to seek support for those challenges. However, because the parent's mental health will directly impact their child's wellbeing, it is vital that parents are supported.



Mental Health and Your Family

How parental mental health impacts children

When do adult mental health challenges impact children?

When a parent is experiencing mental health challenges, it can impact a child severely, very little, or anywhere in between. When the mental health challenge causes strain in the parent-child relationship, or causes the parent to behave unpredictably, there is a higher likelihood of the child being impacted. Parental co-occurring substance abuse disorder, occupational or marital stress, or similar factors, also increase the risk of the parent's mental health challenge impacting their children.

What can adults do to minimize the impact of a mental health challenge?

Studies show that when adults seek healthy support for their mental health challenge--through therapy, medication, or support groups, etc--their children are significantly less likely to experience lasting negative impacts on their own mental health and wellbeing. In fact, when parents seek these supports, they are modeling for their children positive ways to address stress and challenges, which in turn makes it more likely for children to seek similar supports when they experience challenges as adults. In this way, seeing an adult experience a mental health challenge and get support for it can be a powerful experience for children.

How can I talk to my child about my mental health condition?

Be open and honest with your child in age-appropriate ways. Acknowledge your emotions and remind your child that this is caused by chemicals in your own brain, not because of your child or their actions. Share with your child how you are feeling and what you are doing to feel better: "Daddy is feeling frustrated. I am going to take ten big breaths to help my brain calm down"; "Mommy is feeling overwhelmed today. I am going to have some extra rest in my bed, and then call my therapist to talk about how I am feeling". Help your child acknowledge their own emotions as well. Read books together that talk about feelings or characters that experience emotional challenges.

You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first.

– NORM KELLY

Resources

To help you support your mental health:

- Nebraska and Iowa [Mental Health Resources](#) from The Wellbeing Partners
- Maternal Mental Health [Fact Sheets](#)
- [Paternal Mental Health](#) information
- Information on parenting with a [Mental Health Condition](#)
- [Self Care Tools](#) for parents
- [It's Okay to Not Be Okay: Adults get Big Feelings too!](#) Picture book to share with children about adult feelings.
- Tips for [Whole Family Mental Health](#)

