

## **Noticing and Responding to Mental Health Concerns:**

It can be challenging for parents and caregivers to know what might be a typical reaction to stressful times, and what signs and symptoms may suggest that professional mental health assistance could be beneficial for children. Here is some information to help you understand and respond to your child's needs.

### **You may notice changes in behaviours and emotions that could be potential signs of a mental health problem. Ask yourself:**

- Are these behaviours and emotions out of character for my child?
- Are they having a negative impact on my child's ability to enjoy everyday life?
- Are these concerning behaviours happening more often, more intense and/or lasting longer?

### **If you're concerned about your child's emotional health, you can start by talking to your child:**

- Start the conversation by describing changes you have noticed (e.g., "I have noticed that you seem to be getting frustrated more easily these days, and not as patient with others as you usually are.")
- Share that you wonder about how your child might be feeling and if there is any way you could be helpful (e.g., "Is there something bothering you, or something I could do that might help?")
- It is useful to help your child to name the emotions they are feeling (e.g., "It sounds like you miss your friendship with Rohan and that you are feeling sad about that. Do I have that right?")
- Stay calm and don't abandon the conversation if your child responds with "nothing is wrong...leave me alone". If this happens, reassure your child that you are there for them. Give your child some time and then try again.

### **Tips for Supporting Your Child's Mental Health**

- Take pressure off where you can. For example, avoid talking about things causing you stress. Try not to expose them to worrisome news in the media.
- Listen to your child as they describe their thoughts and emotions. Reflect on what you hear and validate their experience. Try not to judge, jump in with quick solutions, or minimize the concern. Seek to understand.
- Connect with your child in meaningful ways as often as possible. Children and youth rely on the caring adults in their life to lead them through difficult situations and emotions.

If your child does not seem to be improving with the actions you have tried, reach out for help. Your family doctor is a great place to start. For additional community supports and services in your area please refer to the UCDSB website under mental health and wellness.

The above content was developed from School Mental Health Ontario's Noticing Mental Health Concerns for Your Child resource and provided by the UCDSB Mental Health and Wellness Department. Visit <https://smho-smso.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Info-sheet-noticing-concerns.pdf> to view the complete resource.