



4

**Key Indicators
Your Child May be
Struggling with
Their Mental Health**

5

**Strategies
to Nurture Your
Child's Mental
Well-Being**



“...children are a heritage from the Lord...”

— Psalm 127:3

If that verse brings a mix of emotions from joy to fear, you aren't alone!

While agreeing that children are a blessing, we also feel the weight of the tremendous responsibility it is to raise children. It's natural to feel overwhelmed amidst the sea of conflicting advice that bombards us from every direction. Books, podcasts, and social media all offer their take on what we should or shouldn't be doing.

Is it any wonder parents may feel paralyzed or like they just don't know what to do?

In moments of uncertainty, we can find guidance in the unwavering truth of God and His Word. This guide aims to provide practical parenting ideas firmly rooted in solid Biblical truths, offering support and direction as you navigate the rewarding path of nurturing your children.

4 Key Indicators Your Child May be Struggling with Their Mental Health



Special Note

If these symptoms are present, they could indicate that your child may benefit from additional support from a mental health care professional. A great place to start is your child's physician who can help assess the situation and provide referrals.



Sometimes our kids go through tough seasons and manage to bounce back. Other times, deeper mental health issues may be at play.

As parents, we must be vigilant observers of change and be willing to ask hard questions. In the following section, we highlight four key areas to watch for shifts that could indicate your child might be facing such challenges.

1. Behavioral & mood changes

Watch for changes to your child's typical behavior and disposition such as:

- A prolonged shift from being lively and outgoing to becoming reserved or withdrawn over the course of several weeks. Equally important, notice when your typically cheerful child unexpectedly displays signs of sullenness or withdrawal
- Loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed or a lack of pleasure even when they continue participating. They may also display restlessness, seem constantly "on edge," or become easily fatigued
- Decreased communication, minimal language responses, and increased irritability
- Neglecting personal hygiene, like showering less frequently, decreased dental care, and showing disinterest in their appearance
- Struggling with sleep—whether falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restless sleep

These are all signs that your child is dealing with feelings of overwhelm, hopelessness, anxiety, and/or depression. If you observe these behaviors or significant changes in your child's mood, it is crucial to engage your child in an open conversation and ask about whether they have thoughts of hurting or killing themselves.

Please rest assured that asking your child about suicidal thoughts will not plant the idea in their mind. On the contrary, research shows that initiating this conversation is actually protective and reduces the risk of suicide.

If your child shares that they are feeling suicidal, it is critical to provide them with additional support.

Talk with your child's doctor for help and appropriate referrals. If your child is actively suicidal, which means they have thoughts about suicide, a plan, access to the means to carry out the plan, and the intention to act upon it, your child needs immediate help. Call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 988 or go immediately to the nearest ER.

If your child does not express thoughts of self-harm or suicide but is experiencing the behavioral changes mentioned above that impact their relationships or their ability to do schoolwork or other activities, they may still benefit from additional support.

On the flip side, if you notice the following changes in behavior:

- A sudden increase in activity
- Unusually rapid and/or excessive talking
- Decreased need for sleep
- Heightened distractibility or tendency to veer off-topic during conversations
- An increase in risky behaviors, spending, alcohol, or drug use

These behaviors could indicate a manic or hypomanic episode, especially if the behaviors last 4-7 days or longer. It is important to seek additional support and care.

2. Relational changes

Pay attention to any shifts in your child's typical relational patterns, such as:

- A sudden shift in friend groups
- A change in how they interact with the family, especially within the home. Teens typically are less excited about engaging with family in front of others but will still talk with parents at home
- Going from openly sharing about their life to becoming more reserved

Discovering your identity is a challenge that comes with the territory of growing up. It's normal for kids to explore different versions of themselves as they navigate this journey of self-discovery. However, if radical changes in social relationships persist over a few weeks, it could indicate that your child is struggling with this developmental task and may benefit from additional mental health support.



3. Physical changes

Watch for shifts in your child's physical appearance that deviate from their usual patterns, such as:

- Sudden, unexplained weight loss or weight gain
- They begin wearing long sleeves and layers when it is not weather appropriate
- Developing a hoarse voice unrelated to illness or allergies

These changes could potentially point to an eating disorder, while the alteration in clothing choices could indicate self-harming behavior. If these symptoms persist, this is a sign that additional support may be needed. Seeking medical and/or mental health care could be helpful.





4. School performance

Keep an eye out for any changes in your child's typical school performance, such as:

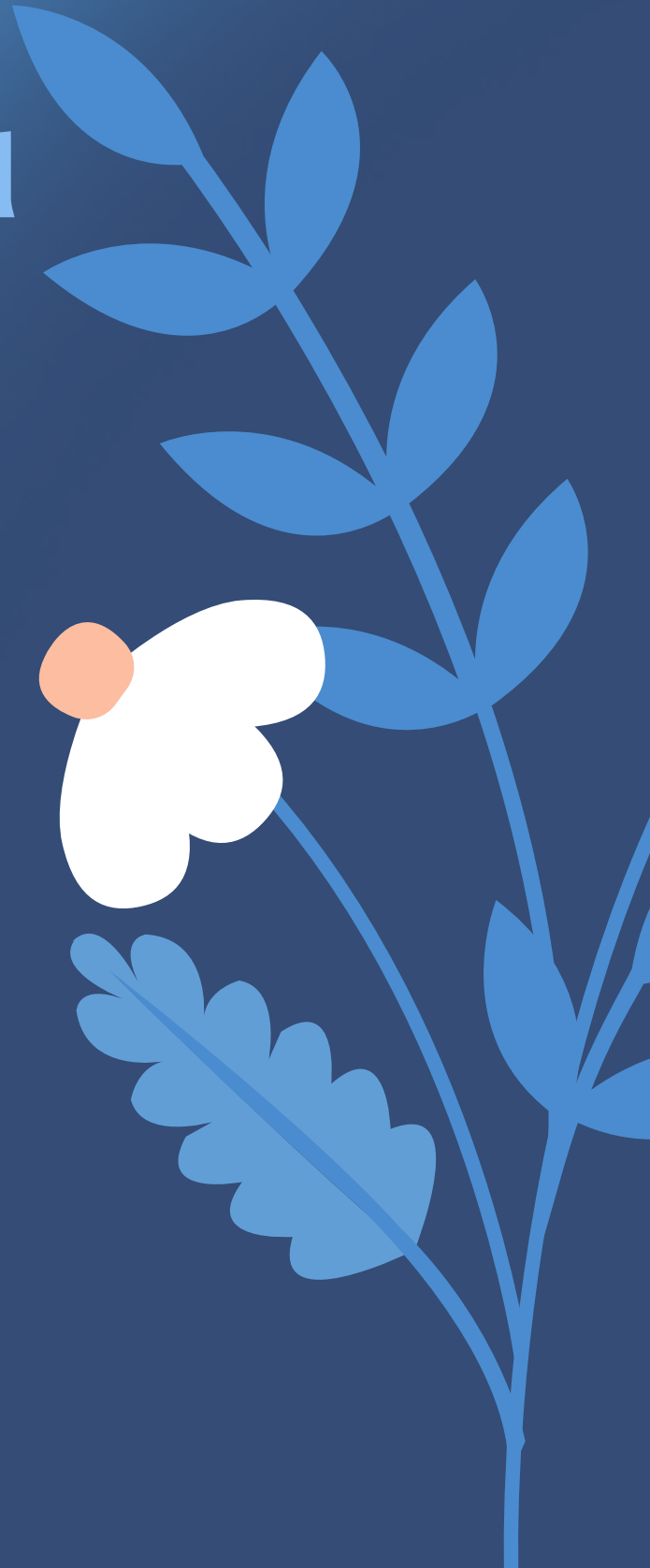
- Taking longer than peers to complete homework
- Difficulty staying organized with schoolwork
- Consistently not turning work in on time
- Previously doing well in school, but now consistently struggling
- Trouble following multi-step instructions
- Struggle to make and maintain friendships

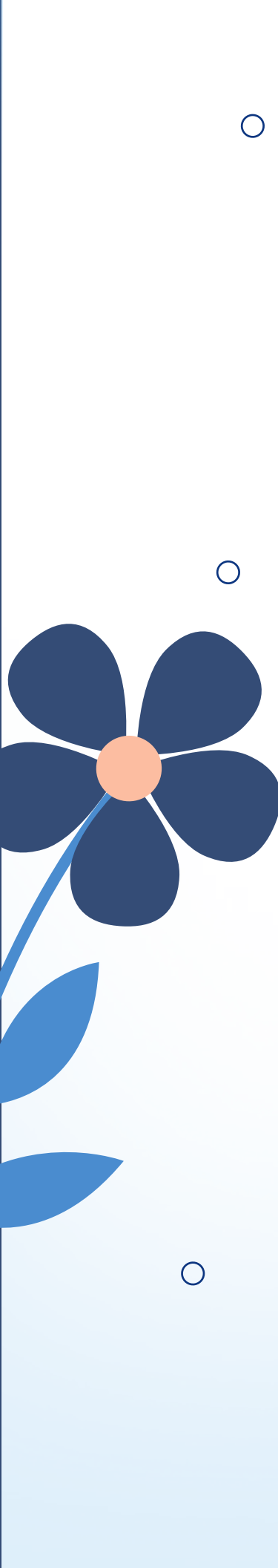
These could indicate attention disorders, learning challenges, or other mental health issues. Sometimes these challenges are present from the onset of school, while others may emerge during middle or high school. Some children are adept at compensating for these struggles and fly under the radar until school becomes more demanding. These struggles often come with negative feedback from teachers, parents, and peers and can increase the risk of depression, anxiety, and/or self esteem issues.

5 Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Mental Well-being

Children observe and repeat what they see. That's why it's critical that we, as parents and guardians, set an example and equip ourselves with effective strategies to navigate the ups and downs of life and teach them to our kids.

Here are some helpful strategies!





1.

Practice emotional intelligence at home

Recognize that people often find it difficult to communicate on an emotional level. Create opportunities for your children to practice emotion language so they have the comfort level and vocabulary to communicate their emotional life with you.

- Share daily highs and lows at family meals, communicating how each made you feel. Everyone in the family—parents included—should participate. This allows parents to model sharing emotion in a healthy way while simultaneously strengthening family bonds and trust
- Be curious about your child's feelings as they talk about their day. Share how things make you feel
- Honor and respect everyone's emotional experience. Avoid saying, "You shouldn't feel ..." instead, express gratitude for their willingness to share by saying, "Thanks for sharing that." Practicing this within your family teaches empathy

2.

Learn effective self-care/ coping strategies

...and share them with your children.

- Attend a self-care group to learn skills
- Research self-care or coping strategies online
- Practice self-care strategies with your children when they are calm, making them easier to implement when needed.



Self-care strategy examples:

Take a walk, listening to music, praying, reading a good book, gardening

3.

Empower kids to cope

Help your kids identify times they may need coping strategies. Teach them to recognize:

- What emotional states can be helped with strategies
- What physical symptoms let me know I need strategies
- What situations might come up that would be tough to deal with

4.

Nurture Self-Compassion

Learn and teach your kids about self-compassion. Our culture tends to set us up for anxiety and perfectionism. Practicing self-compassion makes us more productive, less depressed, less anxious, and more likable. Learn more about self-compassion by visiting:

self-compassion.org

5.

Foster Family Connection

Building an environment where your kids sense they belong gives them a sense of significance. Belonging tells your child they are an important part of the family. A child develops a sense of belonging by being loved, nurtured, and accepted as they are. Significance tells your child that they have something of value to contribute to the family. A child develops a sense of significance by contributing to the family. This can be accomplished by expecting each child to complete age-appropriate tasks or chores for the family.

Your child feels like they belong when they are emotionally connected and feel secure about how they fit within the family.

You can build a sense of belonging by:

- Asking questions, listening to responses, seeking to enter their world
- Being respectful
- Keeping and teaching an open mind
- Practicing an attitude of acceptance
- Validating efforts and the character qualities that it takes to make that effort (like perseverance, hard-work, dedication, commitment, etc.)
- Having one-on-one time at least once a week per child for 20-30 minutes or more. Let the child choose the activity (within reason) and commit to fully engaging with the child on their level

Foster an environment continued...

Your child feels significant when they feel capable—like they make a difference— and believe they are contributing in a meaningful way. You can help build a sense of significance when you:

- Create opportunities for contribution, such as age-appropriate chores from childdevelopmentinfo.com
- Acknowledge appreciation for efforts ("Wow, you really worked hard on that! I can see how creative you were there! That was a lot of work, and you did it!")
- Maintain realistic, age/developmentally appropriate expectations of results (support/help them achieve the goal until they can do it independently)
- Focus on the improvements they make, not how far off they are from the goal

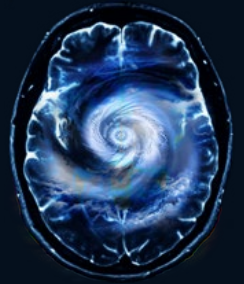
Need more?

Join Westside for a 4-week teaching series



W NEW SERIES

Battle for our Kids



How do we—as parents, guardians, and Christ-followers—equip and support the next generation, fortify their faith, and nurture a resilient spiritual foundation?

As we prepare to send our children back to school, The Battle for Our Kids will help arm us with the information and tools to navigate the challenging battlegrounds our kids face every day: culture, technology, and peer influence.

AUGUST 13 - SEPTEMBER 3

WFC Lenexa: 8:15, 9:30, 11 a

8500 Woodsonia Drive, Lenexa KS

WFC Speedway: 9:30, 11 a

3001 N 115 St, Kansas City, KS

WFC Online: 8:15, 9:30, 11 a

online.westsidefamily.church

Plan Your Visit

