

## Strategies to Maintain Mental Health

These strategies and techniques are not intended to take the place of professional care or individually prescribed medications. Attempting more therapeutic approaches noted here under the supervision of a licensed professional will yield the greatest success.

### Exercise and stretch

Here's your why:

Exercise and other physical activity produce endorphins — chemicals in the brain that act as natural painkillers — and also improve the ability to sleep, which in turn reduces stress. Scientists have found that regular participation in aerobic exercise has been shown to decrease overall levels of tension, elevate and stabilize mood, improve sleep, and improve self-esteem. About five minutes of aerobic exercise can begin to stimulate anti-anxiety effects.

The body's "fight or flight" response is triggered with stress and the body tenses up. Chronic pain arises in these places where tension is held, such as in the shoulders, lower back, neck and head. Stretching, she added, interrupts that defensive response and provides relief to the tense body. Stretching also promotes circulation of new blood to the brain, which can result in mood elevation.

<https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/managing-anxiety/exercise-stress-and-anxiety>, (<http://stress.lovetoknow.com>)

### Eat Healthy

Here's your why:

Think about it. Your brain is always "on." It takes care of your thoughts and movements, your breathing and heartbeat, your senses — it works hard 24/7, even while you're asleep. This means your brain requires a constant supply of fuel. That "fuel" comes from the foods you eat — and what's in that fuel makes all the difference. Put simply, what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood. Diets high in processed foods and refined sugars, for example, are harmful to the brain. In addition to worsening your body's regulation of insulin, they also promote inflammation and oxidative stress. Multiple studies have found a correlation between a diet high in refined sugars and impaired brain function — and even a worsening of symptoms of mood disorders, such as depression. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that helps regulate sleep and appetite, mediate moods, and inhibit pain. Since about 95% of your serotonin is produced in your gastrointestinal tract, and your gastrointestinal tract is lined with a hundred million nerve cells, or neurons, it makes sense that the inner workings of your digestive system don't just help you digest food, but also guide your emotions. Studies have shown that when people take probiotics (supplements containing the good bacteria), their anxiety levels, perception of stress, and mental outlook improve, compared with people who did not take probiotics. Healthier diets also tend to be high in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains, and fish and seafood, and contain only modest amounts of lean meats and dairy. They are also void of processed and refined foods and sugars.

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/nutritional-psychiatry-your-brain-on-food-201511168626>

### Sleep

Here's your why:

When we sleep, we cycle through different stages of rest – REM and non-REM sleep. Studies have shown that REM sleep helps our brains improve learning skills, memory, and overall emotional health.

When this type of sleep is disrupted, our neurotransmitters and stress hormones are also disrupted. This disruption can exacerbate any already-present symptoms of mental health conditions and vice versa.

Research shows that 60 percent of adolescents are looking at their phones in the last hour before sleep, and that they get on average an hour less sleep than their peers who don't use their phones before bed.

Blue light from electronic screens interferes with falling asleep; on top of that, checking social media is not a relaxing or sleep-inducing activity.

Teens who spent three or more hours a day on electronic devices were 28% more likely to get less than seven hours of sleep, and teens who visited social media sites every day were 19% more likely not to get adequate sleep. Teens who don't sleep enough are more than twice as likely to report higher levels of depressive symptoms (31% vs 12%). Teens who sleep less than seven hours a night are also 68% more likely to have at least one risk factor for suicide. The CDC recommends 9 hrs of sleep for 6-13yr olds, and 8 hrs for ages 14-17.

[www.neurocorecenters.com](http://www.neurocorecenters.com), <https://childmind.org/article/is-social-media-use-causing-depression/>  
[www.cdc.gov/sleep](http://www.cdc.gov/sleep)

## Practice Relaxation and Grounding Techniques:

Here's your why:

No one can avoid all stress, but you can counteract its detrimental effects by learning how to produce the *relaxation response*, a state of deep rest that is the polar opposite of the stress response. The relaxation response puts the brakes on stress and brings your body and mind back into a state of equilibrium. Grounding is a technique that helps keep someone in the present. They help reorient a person to the here-and-now and in reality. Grounding skills can be helpful in managing overwhelming feelings or intense anxiety. They help someone to regain their mental focus from an often intensely emotional state.

Progressive relaxation, breathing exercises, take detailed stock of the room, run through the Five senses exercise (noticing 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and one thing you can taste), practicing sensory awareness (gently snapping a rubber band around your wrist, holding an ice cold or hot drink and focusing attention on the sensation, etc.), coloring, pausing to internally remind yourself of your name, the date, the time, your age, your birthday, and any other details that might you to bring you the present.etc.

<https://www.helpguide.org>, <https://www.peirsac.org>

## Improve Your Ratio of Real Life to Digital Life Interactions

Here's your why:

Studies show that people who spend more time on social media sites feel more socially isolated than those who don't. This might be because of a disconnect between our online lives and our real ones. Past research reminds us that 93% of our communication of attitudes and feelings is non-verbal.

Subsequently, kids who spend more time engaging with a screen than with other kids or adults can struggle to understand emotion, create strong relationships or become more dependent on others.

It's important for kids to experience unstructured "free play," which means that *they* decide what to do, and how to do it, and are playing simply for play's sake—not to get to the next level in a game, or learn some specific skill. Children should experience the fun of making up their own rules — and breaking them — as they go along. This kind of play lets kids: move at their own pace, instead of being driven (or hurried) along by fast-moving media, develop creativity, get experience making decisions, practice sharing and working with others, and learn to be a leader and self-advocate. Apps — however educational they claim to be — are no substitute for the kind of learning that comes to kids naturally if we let it.

See the last page of this document for additional tips for healthy social media use.

<https://childmind.org/article/is-social-media-use-causing-depression/>,  
[www.npr.org/2017/05/02/526514168/why-social-media-isnt-always-verysocial](http://www.npr.org/2017/05/02/526514168/why-social-media-isnt-always-verysocial),  
<https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865609628/How-technology-is-changing-the-way-we-communicate.html>

## Practice Radical Acceptance:

Here's your why:

Accepting reality is difficult when life is painful. No one wants to experience pain, disappointment, sadness, or loss. But those experiences are a part of life. When you attempt to avoid or resist those emotions, you add suffering to your pain. You can stop suffering by practicing acceptance. Acceptance means that you can turn your resistant ruminating into accepting thoughts like, "I'm in this situation. I don't approve of it. I don't think it's OK, but it is what it is, and I can't change that it happened."

Imagine that you are late for an important job interview. Traffic is especially congested, and you are stopped at red light after red light. Raging at the traffic lights or the drivers in front of you will not help you get to your destination sooner and will only add to your upset. Accepting the situation and doing the best you can will be less emotionally painful, and likely more effective. With acceptance you will arrive at your interview less distressed and perhaps better able to manage the situation.

There is a parallel here for parenting as well. See the last page for more on how this applies to parenting.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pieces-mind/201207/radical-acceptancepa>

## Have the Courage to Utilize Professional Therapeutic Support

Here's your why:

Seeking mental health support and facing personal challenges takes courage. Avoiding therapeutic help under the guise of personal strength is a common, less than honest rationalization, especially for males. Would you consider "toughing out" diabetes? A mental illness is no different, and why on earth would you give any less care and attention to your brain?? It is also important to be a good consumer of therapy. Just as you would see different medical specialists for different issues, therapists also have different specialties, skills, and treatment approaches. It is important to do your research to identify a provider that can best address your specific challenges.

Getting therapeutic support is empowering, as it allows us to constructively address our challenges, rather than focusing on hiding them. Evidence shows that when teens have positive expectations for treatment, they can be cooperative partners and learn better self-management skills. School-based programs are proving successful in decreasing mental health stigma and increasing treatment-seeking behavior. Encouraging more kids to speak up and get help can change their lives.

<https://childmind.org/report/2017-childrens-mental-health-report/introduction/>

## **Steps parents can take to insure healthy social media use:**

- **Focus on balance:** Make sure your kids are also engaging in social interaction offline, and have time for activities that help build identity and self-confidence.
- **Turn off notifications:** App developers are getting more and more aggressive with notifications to lure users to interrupt whatever they're doing to engage constantly with their phones. Don't let them.
- **Look out for girls at higher risk of depression:** Monitor girls who are going through a particularly tough time or are under unusual stress. Negative effects of social media can have more impact when confidence is down.
- **Teach mindful use of social media:** Encourage teenagers to be honest with themselves about how time spent on social media makes them feel, and disengage from interactions that increase stress or unhappiness.
- **Model restraint and balance in your own media diet:** Set an example by disengaging from media to spend quality family time together, including phone-free dinners and other activities. Kids may resist, but they'll feel the benefits.
- **Phone-free time before sleep:** Enforce a policy of no smartphones in the bedroom after a specific time and overnight. Use an old-fashioned alarm clock to wake up.

<https://childmind.org/article/is-social-media-use-causing-depression/>

## **Radical acceptance parenting:**

Two key elements of this approach are accepting our authority as parents, and accepting our children as individuals. After love and respect, parental authority, despite the unique challenges that come with it in our society today, is essential. Parents today are met by children who place immense academic pressure on themselves, and who carry home with them intense social pressures and distractions via social media and gaming. Parental authority means having clearly communicated expectations in spite of these pressures, and consequences for falling short of those expectations (versus punishment). It takes work, persistence and a methodical approach that is non-emotional. It is important to be mindful that yelling does not communicate authority, and speaking directly is not yelling.

Acceptance of our children as individuals begins with accepting that our children are unique, yet most similar to ourselves in that they are no less flawed. Dr. Wendy Mogul, author of *The Blessings of a Skinned Knee*, writes, "Psychologist Michael Thompson says that we make unfairly 'generic' demands on our children: 'It is the only period in your life when you're expected to do all things well. Adults don't hold themselves to those standards. We don't interview the pediatrician about whether he can shoot a basketball, or quiz our accountant on biology before we let her do our taxes.' The age at which we expect children to become very good at

everything is getting lower. Part of the reason for this is parents' fears of an uncertain future, one that is hurtling at us more quickly than ever before. Parents worry that in this hyper-paced world, only the child who excels at everything will survive. 'Preparing' our children for this new world by turning them into super competitive generalists is useless because we can't second guess the skills they will need twenty years from now. The only things that are certain to be valuable are character traits such as honesty, tenacity, flexibility, optimism and compassion – the same traits that have served people for centuries.”

Accepting our children and their different strengths, limitations and vulnerabilities, and accepting that different children grow in different ways at different times, can help to create more balance for both child and parent.

*“Try to see your child as a seed that came in a packet without a label. Your job is to provide the right environment and nutrients and to pull the weeds. You can't decide what kind of flower you'll get or in which season it will bloom.” - Anonymous*

[www.empoweringparents.com](http://www.empoweringparents.com), *The Blessings of a Skinned Knee*, Wendy Mogul, Ph.D.

## **SCSD Progressive Tiers of Mental Health Interventions**

### **School-based Prevention & Universal Interventions**

**K-5:** Responsive Classroom, group lessons addressing feelings, coping skills, physical and emotional self-regulation skills, social skills and social problem solving skills, growth mindset, diversity, identification of positive and negative self-talk, social skills and social problem solving, anger management, appropriate and inappropriate physical contact, and healthy personal choices.

**6-8:** Success Highways Resiliency curriculum (FACS), Advisory lessons, Brainology curriculum, Counselor and social worker topics on self-esteem, stress and mindfulness, empathy and understanding differences, cyberbullying and online safety, substance abuse (including alcohol and tobacco), peer relationships, diversity, personal boundaries, and decision making strategies.

**9-12:** 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Health curriculum, Anti-bias curriculum, PPS team presentations on mental health and suicide awareness, stress management and coping skills, identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships, presentations and small group work on substance abuse (including vaping), and collaboration with Student Life Coordinator.

### **Early Identification and Targeted School Interventions**

Lunch Bunch groups, Banana Splits, Cool Cats, Zones of Regulation, K-12 Whole Child Study Team, parent, teacher and/or counselor referrals, building to building at-risk identification transition meetings, parent conferences, team meetings, K-8 small group meetings targeting specific social issues, and 9-12 small group work on substance abuse and mental health, individual counseling interventions, and alternative to suspension substance counseling.

### **Intensive Interventions**

IEP or 504 Plans, SMS True North Program, SHS Transitional Support Program, partnerships with hospital settings, therapeutic providers, county mental health support networks, and approved external support placements.