

# Growing Minds: Understanding Mental Health Across Developmental Stages

Mental Health Series



## Why don't kids come with a manual?

Don't you wish each child came with an operating manual? The reality is kids just don't come with instructions but understanding mental health and developmental stages in children is crucial in helping your child navigate each stage.

**Did you know that kids often reevaluate past events as they enter different developmental stages?** Kids who've been through tough stuff at young age may have new questions or realizations as they grow. It is important to keep in mind children who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), also known as childhood traumas, may experience different ways their past affects them as they get older. It might make them feel sad or worried and they may have trouble with school. For others, it can make it tough to make good friends or to trust others.

These feelings and problems can stick around as a child transitions into the teenage years and as they become adults. **Do you know what to do if your child is struggling to comprehend what has happened in the past as they enter a new stage?** There are people who can help, like therapists and friends, and supportive family members. So, **as adults we must be aware and notice when our children are trying to make sense of something they experienced in the past** as they enter new developmental stages throughout childhood. Even if a child went through something hard when they were younger, there are things we can do now to make them feel better.

### Here are five ways to provide support:

1. Create a Safe and Open Environment
2. Offer Validation and Empathy
3. Provide Age-Appropriate Information
4. Seek Professional Help if Needed
5. Reinforce Coping Strategies



## What to expect in each stage...

### Developmental stages from infancy to adulthood:

#### Infancy (0-2 years):

- Rapid physical growth and sensory exploration
- Forming early attachments and basic emotions

#### Early Childhood (3-6 years):

- Developing language skills and basic problem-solving
- Building self-concept and social interactions

#### Middle Childhood (7-11 years):

- Steady physical growth and academic development
- Formation of peer relationships and growing independence

#### Adolescence (12-18 years):

- Puberty
- Enhanced abstract thinking and romantic interests

#### Early Adulthood (19-25+ years):

- Peak physical health and career development
- Forming intimate relationships and personal growth



# Featured articles

## Let Them Talk: Say Less & Listen More

When it comes to mental wellness in kids, the most important thing parents can do is to simply remind their children that they're ready to listen. People at the highest level like our U.S. Surgeon General are sharing with us just how important it is to listen...

"The most important thing that you can do for your child during turbulence is to make sure that they know you love them and that they can talk to you," he said. "For them just to know it's OK for them to talk to you, it's not something to be ashamed of, and there are people they can go to for help ... can go a long way to helping a child feel that they're not alone."

Studies show children today are lonely. In fact, loneliness in children today can be attributed to many factors, including increased screen time, busy schedules, shifting family dynamics, and academic pressures. Negative peer experiences, social media, and cultural norms also play a role. That is a lot for our youth to have to navigate.

To combat this, quality social interactions are key. Encourage unstructured play, and quiet time. It's good if you can create a supportive environment where children can openly discuss their feelings. Some parents model this for their children by sharing their own feelings coupled with how they were resilient. Building strong emotional connections within the family and fostering resilience are key steps in addressing and preventing childhood loneliness.

### Here are some tips for parents to combat loneliness through better listening:

- Active Listening: Give your full attention when your child or others are talking.
- Quality Time: Spend one-on-one time and engage in meaningful activities.
- Open Communication: Create a safe space for open and honest conversations.
- Ask Open-Ended Questions: Encourage more detailed responses with open questions.
- Empathetic Responses: Show understanding and validate your child's emotions.
- Family Rituals: Establish bonding rituals like sharing highs and lows at dinner.

**"Say two words for every hundred words your child says."**

-Dr. Kevin Skinner  
ParentGuidance.org Clinical Director

## At What Age Does Mental Illness Start?

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the majority of mental illnesses (75 percent) begin by age 24. However, 50 percent of all lifetime mental illnesses begin by age 14. This means that most mental health conditions emerge during childhood and adolescence.

One question that is asked a lot is: When do I need to get my child professional help?

A few common warning signs to look out for might be if your child is feeling sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks or if there are noticeable changes in your child's behavior, mood, personality or sleeping habits.

### Here are some facts:

**Anxiety:** generalized anxiety or worry typically starts to show when children reach school age

**Depression:** depression tends to be higher in older children and teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17

**Suicide Risk:** Suicide risk happens most frequently among children between the ages of 15 and 19

**Bipolar:** can occur in children as young as 5



Understanding Your Child's  
Emotional Development: 11-14  
Years of Age

Begin Course

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### Take a no-cost course at ParentGuidance.org

Dr. Skinner teaches the common issues children between the ages of 11-14 face that can either negatively or positively impact a child's emotional development. Additional courses in this series address ages 5-10, 10-13, 14-18 and 19+.



### Need more support or info?

Click the [ParentGuidance.org](https://www.parentguidance.org) medallion to explore an eCourse or visit [Ask-A-Therapist](https://www.parentguidance.org).

### Works Cited

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