



Inclusion Tools for After School Professionals

brought to you by the San Francisco Special Needs Inclusion/Mental Health Consultation Collaborative
The Special Needs Inclusion Project, Instituto Familiar de la Raza & Edgewood Center for Children and Families

SNIPPET #2: Tuning in to Mental Health

Mental or emotional health refers to your overall **psychological well-being**. It includes the way you feel about yourself, the quality of your relationships, and your ability to manage your feelings and deal with difficulties. From early childhood until late life, mental health is the springboard of thinking and communication skills which foster **healthy positive relationships**.

People who are mentally and emotionally healthy have:

- A sense of contentment.
- The ability to build and maintain fulfilling relationships.
- A zest for living and the ability to laugh and have fun.
- The ability to deal with stress and bounce back from adversity.
- A sense of meaning and purpose, in both their activities and their relationships.
- The flexibility to learn new things and adapt to change.
- A balance between work and play, rest and activity, etc.
- Self-confidence and high self-esteem.

These positive characteristics of mental and emotional health allow you to participate in life to the fullest extent possible through productive, meaningful activities and strong relationships. These positive characteristics also

help you cope when faced with life's challenges and stresses.

The Role of Resilience in Mental and Emotional Health

Being emotionally and mentally healthy doesn't mean never going through bad times or experiencing emotional problems. We all go through disappointments, loss, and change. And while these are normal parts of life, they can still cause sadness, anxiety, and stress.

The difference is that people with good emotional health have an ability to bounce back from adversity, trauma, and stress. This ability is called **resilience**. People who are emotionally and mentally healthy have the **tools for coping with difficult situations and maintaining a positive outlook**. They remain focused, flexible, and creative in bad times as well as good.

One of the key factors in resilience is the ability to balance your emotions. The capacity to recognize your emotions and express them appropriately helps you avoid getting stuck in depression, anxiety, or other negative mood states. Another key factor is having a strong support network. **Having trusted people you can turn to for encouragement and support will boost your resilience in tough times.**

Are Children Different than Adults?

Good mental health allows children to think clearly, develop socially and learn new skills. Additionally, good friends and encouraging words from adults are all important for helping children develop self confidence, high self-esteem, and a healthy emotional outlook on life. **Children are highly dependent on adults for their sense of well being.**

To Make a Difference in a Child's Sense of Well-Being

- **Give children unconditional love**

- ◇ Love, security and acceptance should be at the heart of family life.
- ◇ Children need to know that your love does not depend on his or her accomplishments.
- ◇ Mistakes and/or defeats should be expected and accepted.
- ◇ Confidence grows in a home that is full of unconditional love and affection.

- **Nurture children's confidence and self-esteem**

- ◇ **Praise Them** - Encouraging children's first steps or their ability to learn a new game helps them develop a desire to explore and learn about their surroundings. Allow children to explore and play in a safe area where they cannot get hurt. Assure them by smiling and talking to them often. Be an active participant in their activities. Your attention helps build their self-confidence and self-esteem.
- ◇ **Set Realistic Goals** - Young children need realistic goals that match their ambitions with their abilities. With your help, older children can choose activities that test their abilities and increase their self-confidence.
- ◇ **Be Honest** - Do not hide your failures from your children. It is important for them to know that we all make mistakes. It can be very re-assuring to know that adults are not perfect.

- ◇ **Avoid Sarcastic Remarks** - If a child loses a game or fails a test, find out how he or she feels about the situation. Children may get discouraged and need a pep talk. Later, when they are ready, talk and offer assurance.
- ◇ **Encourage children** - To not only strive to do their best, but also to enjoy the process. Trying new activities teaches children about teamwork, self-esteem and new skills.

The biggest gift you can give yourself to support a child's mental health is to take care of yourself and maintain your own mental health. The following are a few tips for reducing stress for those in the role of caring for children:

- Take time out each day to do something for yourself. Exercise, stretching, listening to soothing music, reading or meditation are some proven ways to reduce stress.
- Have a sense of humor – laugh and play with others.
- Accept that children make mistakes, are inconsistent and act thoughtlessly- this is part of being a child.
- Count to 10 before you react when you get angry.
- Ease tension with a human touch- share a hug; give a pat on the back.
- Listen to the child and show you value their conversations.
- Schedule in family fun and fitness. Laughter and physical activity are great stress reducers.
- Learn how children mature so your expectations of the child's behavior are realistic.