

What parents can do

Parents and guardians are often the first to detect their child's emotional struggles. Here are some tips for monitoring and promoting healthy emotional development at home.

1. Talk with your child

This is both the easiest and hardest way to make sure your kids are doing OK. Children, especially teenagers, don't always want to talk about how life is going. Ask anyway.

My research shows that simply asking children about their friends, their technology use and their day is an important way to show you care. Even if they don't respond, your interest demonstrates that you're there for them.

Try this one now. Ask your children what they're thinking about the shooting in Florida and how they like their friends and school. Then listen.

2. Think critically about your child's social media use

Monitor your child's cell phone usage making sure that you have passwords to log on to it. Learners may have Instagram, Snapchat, etc. Accounts that you are not aware of. It is important to monitor these and look at the content that your child posts as well as anything that may be posted by a follower that may be of concern. As a school we have found that some learners download social media apps without parent/guardian knowledge so make sure that you have access to their computer/phone/tablet accounts and monitor them on a regular basis.

Consider taking their electronic devices at night to avoid usage that you may not be aware of.

From virtual war games to cruel trolls, the Internet is full of violence. The relationship between violent content and aggression hasn't been consistent in research: some studies see no relationship at all, while others find some correlation between violent video games and violent behavior.

This mixed evidence suggests that online content affects children differently, so parents must assess how well their child handles it. If your daughter likes "Assassin's Creed" but is gentle, socially successful and happy, the onscreen violence may not be strongly impacting her.

But if your child is drawn to violent games and tends to be aggressive or troubled, discuss the situation with your pediatrician or school counselor.

3. Consider what your child is missing out on

Is your child sleeping properly? Do your kids socialize with other young people? These two behaviors are linked to mental health in children, and excessive screen time can reduce or diminish the quality of both.

4. Assess your child's relationships

Like adults, children need confidants to feel invested in and connected with their community. The trusted person can be parent, a family member or a friend – just make sure someone's playing that role.

For children who struggle to make friends and build relationships, there are programs that can help them learn how. Partner with the school counselor to explore programs that might be the right fit for your child.

5. Fret productively about screen time

Research shows that excessive screen time can damage kids' brains. That's alarming in part because parents can't realistically keep kids entirely off devices.

So rather than just fret over screen time, focus instead on how children can benefit from a variety of activities. Evidence shows that children who experience different pursuits over the course of their day – from sports and music to an after-school job – are happier and healthier for it.