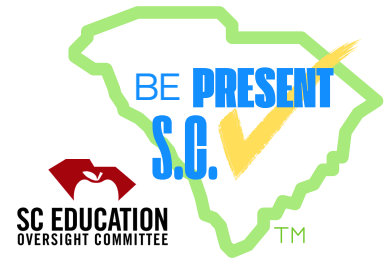




# Tips to Support your Child's Mental Health

Authors: Rob Hock, Aidyn Iachini, Patrice Penney, Cheri Shapiro  
College of Social Work, University of South Carolina



For tips on how to talk to your child about their mental health visit [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

## Help your child to problem solve

One way to support your child's mental health is to teach them how to independently solve problems that they may encounter at school. Challenges that children face can be related to school work or homework assignments, or about relationships with their peers at school. Solving problems independently can help children feel confident and competent. Teaching your child the key steps to problem-solving, and prompting them through these steps, is a great way to teach a skill that will last a lifetime:



- STEP 1** Decide what the specific problem is
- STEP 2** Brainstorm solutions
- STEP 3** Pick the best solution(s) and try it out
- STEP 4** Check in to see if the solution worked
- STEP 5** Refine the solution...if needed!

## Responding to concerns about your child's mental health

As parents, we sometimes worry about how our children are doing. You might notice your child being more quiet than usual, staying in their room more often, or just looking sad. Everyone gets sad or down at times ... but how do you know if it is something more?

If your child looks sad or is more upset or sensitive than usual, and at the same time is eating less or sleeping more, these are signs to pay attention to. Check in with your child and see how they are doing. If feelings of being sad or down persist, and this is getting in the way of your child enjoying things they usually like to do, this may be a time to seek professional help.

As parents, we are experts on how our children are doing. Children don't always tell us if something is wrong, so be on the lookout for warning signs like not wanting to go to school, doing poorly in school, or changes in their mood or behavior (like sleeping or eating habits).

If you see these signs, checking in with your child is a great first step to sorting out what may be troubling them. This can also be a time to help coach them to solve a problem or challenge that they are facing.

## Responding to your child's anxieties

Fears and worries are a normal part of growing up, and most children feel worried or fearful at times. So how do you know if this is something to pay attention to?

If your child seems anxious and avoidant because they are worried, the first step is to have a chat with your child.

Using open-ended questions like "How are you doing?" or "I notice you seem worried...what are you worried about?" gives your child a chance to let you know what is happening. Talking to your child about how you cope with feelings of worry or anxiety can be helpful.

Ideas that you can share to help your child cope with worries or anxiety include taking a few deep, slow breaths, or writing down some positive or helpful things they can say to themselves when they get worried, like "It's going to be ok" or "I can do this" can be helpful. It is important for children to learn skills to cope with feelings of anxiety on their own, because we are not always there to help. If your child continues to have feelings of anxiety that are getting in the way of doing things like visiting with friends or going to school, consider seeking professional help.