



WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

ESS1503.7S | Seventh Grade

Series III

These parenting guides are a gift to you from the Sioux Empire United Way. They were adapted and written by the South Dakota State Cooperative Extension Service. We hope the information is helpful and gives you additional resources to assist in your efforts to raise healthy and successful children. If you need additional resources for your family, you can call the HELP!Line by dialing 211 or 334-6646. This is a United Way partner program that connects you to all available services for your family.

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What is Emotional Wellness?

As you read the heading on this newsletter, you may have asked yourself, “What is emotional wellness, and how does it relate to my child’s development?”

Emotional wellness, or social-emotional wellness, is a developmental process. In the same manner that your child develops physically and intellectually, he or she also develops emotionally. Children need to develop emotional and social competencies in order to do such things as

- recognize and manage emotions;
- develop caring and concern for others;
- establish positive relationships;
- make responsible decisions; and
- handle changing situations.

As a parent, you have an active role in contributing to your child’s emotional wellness. According to researchers, in order for children to best develop these abilities, children need to “experience safe, nurturing and well-managed environments where they feel valued and respected; they need meaningful interactions with

socially and emotionally competent people; and they need positive and specific guidance” (www.caselorg/basics/definition.php).

The articles in the Wings for Life series pertain to your children’s experiences with other children, competition, the use of free time, daily schedules, money, family togetherness, and many more challenges. The information in each article is intended to help you help your child’s social-emotional learning. Key skills that are addressed in the Wings for Life series include:

- Self-awareness—recognizing feelings and managing anger.
- Understanding others—developing empathy and taking the perspective of others.
- Making responsible decisions and following through—this includes considering the long-term consequences of one’s actions for oneself and others.
- Understanding oneself—handling emotions, setting goals, and dealing with obstacles.
- Building healthy relationships—saying “no” to negative peer pressure and working to resolve conflicts.

Nurturing your child’s emotional wellness will lead to life-long emotional health:

- If a child is able to calm himself when he is angry, he can avoid damaging important personal relationships with others.
- If a child is able to initiate and maintain friendships, she develops both socially and emotionally.
- If a child is able to resolve relationship conflicts respectfully, he will sustain positive personal and professional relationships throughout life.
- If a child is able to make ethical choices, she builds character and her commitment to fairness grows stronger.
- If a child is able to maintain a positive attitude, he handles adversity and challenges in a good way and commits to making the world a better place for himself and others.

This is an informational fact sheet. The purpose of the publication is to provide basic information. It is not intended to be used for assessment or treatment of mental health. If you suspect your child or teen needs help in the emotional wellness and mental health areas, please contact a mental health professional immediately. The term “parent” is used throughout this newsletter. It is intended to encompass guardians and primary caregivers as well.



South Dakota
Cooperative Extension Service



Dating

Adolescence is a time of changes—changes that prompt many questions and much curiosity. During preteen and teen years, youth are looking for explanations about their physical changes and their new or more intense emotions. This is especially true when the subject is the opposite sex, relationships, and dating. When seeking answers, youth look to different sources for information and answers. While they may seek information from their friends/peers, books, magazines, the Internet, or other media, parents need to know that they are still the most influential factor in this important educational process.



Some parents may feel unprepared or uncomfortable in discussing relationship issues with their children; however, this is the best time to establish communication with your child and share your values. Consider the following suggestions:

Don't avoid the subject. Talk to your child about relationships and dating. Your child should understand your values, beliefs, and rules for dating. *The Talk* shouldn't be a one-time event. Start the discussion about relationships with your child early, making sure the conversation is age appropriate.

Keep communication open and two sided. Don't monopolize the conversation or only speak about what you think your child should know. Allow your child to ask questions and, even more importantly, listen to what he has to say. Don't make fun of questions or judge your child or his friends based on the discussion. This may lead to distrust and stop the communication between you and your child.

Allow your child to lead the conversation. Your child may be interested in learning about different information than you planned to discuss or may not be emotionally or intellectually ready to learn about some things, so let your child guide the discussion.

Express your values and expectations. Assess what you value, and share your expectations with your child. Have you discussed your rules with your child? For example, is there an age your child can start dating? Is there a type of date that is appropriate, such as a group date or a movie-at-home date with the parents present?

Be aware of your child's interests, friends, and activities. This may provide opportunities and topics for discussions. It may also flag areas of concern.

You may find it difficult to discuss dating, but letting your child know your views, values, and rules before dating begins will help you avoid much of the turmoil in your future relationship with your child.

Diligence is Working Hard



“What we hope ever to do with ease, we must learn first to do with diligence” (Samuel Johnson, English author). Your child may think that a great tennis player or talented guitar player has natural ability and she can never achieve anything like that.

However, parents generally understand that most accomplishments in life are not a matter of luck—most people have to work hard to do well. Help your child learn that diligence and hard work lead to reaching her goals in life.

At an early age, through her school experience (classroom performance, homework) or leisure time endeavors, your child can learn about being diligent. What are the key components of diligence?

- Approach the important tasks in life with discipline and focus.
- Work hard and don't give up.
- Persevere even when things become difficult or discouraging.
- Try creative solutions to challenges.
- Always do your best.

How do you instill an awareness that hard work is good and valuable? Discuss these ideas with your child:

- There is pride and dignity in doing one's best, even if the result does not come out exactly as you hoped it would.
- Be productive, participate, and show up! People who sit on the sidelines and don't try will never know if they could have succeeded.
- Be inventive. Sometimes the answer is to approach a challenge in a completely new way. Don't be bound by what has always been done before. Use your imagination and creativity to think of an original approach to this situation.
- Have pride in what you have accomplished. Others may not notice it, but if you have set goals for yourself and you accomplish them, there will be the self-satisfaction of knowing that you achieved what you set out to do.

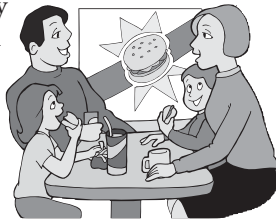
Beyond school, there are other areas where children can practice diligence:

- Learning to play a musical instrument.
- Becoming skilled in a sport.
- Overcoming a disability, such as dyslexia, stuttering, or fear of public speaking.
- Developing a personal quality such as patience, punctuality, kindness, politeness, helpfulness, or listening.

Encourage your child to be a contributing member of her world (family, school, or community). Expect your child to develop a sense of pride in her school. Encourage your child to improve all aspects of her classroom and school environment, program, or activities. This will help your child feel more like part of her community.

Family Mealtime Can Be Good Together Time

In the very fast-paced and busy world that we live in today, it can be a challenge for a family to find time to sit down for a meal together. In fact, what used to be the “norm” of eating meals together has turned into a rare occurrence for some families.



What we used to think of as the traditional home-cooked meal is not a priority in many homes and has been replaced with meals on the run. As a result, families no longer have this valuable time for communicating with each other.

Research indicates that shared family mealtime is on the decline. One-fourth of parents report that their families eat together four times or fewer each week. One-in-ten parents say that they eat only one or no meals each week with their children. These numbers suggest that mealtime has become less and less important in the daily family routine. Conflicting schedules, media influence, lack of commitment, or even cooking skills may be some reasons for this change.

Bringing the family together at mealtime benefits your children both emotionally and socially. Shared family meals contribute to

- a healthier self-image (according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, family-shared meals can increase a child’s sense of belonging and stability);
- a decrease in the risk for depression and drug use;
- a tendency toward better school performance and better relationships with their peers;
- increased communication between parents and children;
- healthier food choices and the consumption of nutritionally balanced meals.

Now that you know the importance of eating meals together, you are probably asking yourself, “How do I make it happen?” Here are some simple suggestions to help get your family around the table at the same time:

- Make it positive! This is an opportunity to share, enjoy, and have fun with the conversation. Learn what is going on in the lives of your children.
- Be flexible. The important thing is that you are eating together, not how fancy the food is or how nice the table-setting looks. If the plan for a family meal doesn’t work one night or even during a particular week, don’t give up!
- Make it a priority! Everyone in the family should both understand that this is important and be committed to the family mealtime.
- Allow family members of all ages to give suggestions for the menu, themes, and even decorations. Young children will enjoy decorating paper placemats. Be creative!

Family mealtime can be a wonderful opportunity to catch up and keep in touch with what is happening in your family. Having healthy family meals together not only helps your family build strong bodies, but also contributes to a happier, more resilient family! Hopefully, it can become both a regular part of your family’s life and a habit that is valued and enjoyed by everyone.

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Resources

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Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel.

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