

Tips for Supporting Families' Mental Health

If we as adults in the family support field are feeling the stress of less control over our daily lives, how can we support parents to take care of and nurture themselves? Many of the families have been sharing how stressed they feel right now.

Below are some tips on how to prepare yourself to engage with families virtually. Using the guiding questions, take time to reflect on your own perspective and experience. Then, join in a conversation with the family using the same questions. Pay attention to what you discover about yourself and the family.

Four things to ask yourself before asking families:

1. How have things changed for you and your family?
2. Where is your level of stress?
3. How is your and your family's sleep? Temper? Joy?
4. Name one thing you can do each day to:
 - relieve stress
 - connect with a loved one
 - remind you of other trying times you've made it through

Developmental Context

Keep in mind the influences on development that interact with each other, such as the nervous system maturing, the child's internal experience, and environmental and external feedback. Think of how these influences contribute to a child developing their core emotional competencies in basic trust and the ability to be in relationships, in self-regulation and sense of self and esteem.

When a child has been out of control, the experience of asserting control, co-regulating and self-regulating builds the child's development and self-esteem. These core competencies in children are the same ones we must practice ourselves and support in parents!

No matter what home visiting model or intervention technique we use, it's our emotional competence in basic trust and ability to connect and repair disconnections in relationships, in self- and mutual-regulation with families, and our sense of self that form the basis for our effectiveness, especially during this time when the stress of the pandemic affects us all.

We can stay in relationship, co-regulate, and nurture others if we first practice self-care by:

- Taking care of our bodies and minds, such as eating healthy food, getting physical activity, and practicing meditation, yoga, mindfulness, stress reduction and/or breathing exercises, possibly using apps.
- Connecting with others. It's especially crucial now to nurture and sustain relationships.
- Taking breaks from media exposure.
- Having accurate sources of information.
- Thinking and acting in terms of what we do have control over, and supporting children and families to do so, especially when it seems so much is being prohibited.