



MAY 16, 2024

# KNOW! TO TAKE A MOMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH

May is Mental Health Month. This month, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) theme is “Take the moment,” encouraging everyone to participate in open dialogues about mental health and normalize practicing mental health care for themselves. In our [Know! Tip](#) from last May, we provided strategies for starting a conversation about mental health with young people in your life. This May, take time not only to have a conversation about mental health but also to “take a moment” for mental health by practicing strategies for maintaining mental well-being in your everyday life. Use the tips below to guide you and your youth in prioritizing mental health care.

## 1. BUILD HEALTHY ROUTINES AS A FAMILY OR CLASSROOM

You don’t have to completely change your lifestyle to prioritize your mental health. Small changes like showing yourself compassion or doing one thing you enjoy daily can benefit your overall mental health. Maintaining a healthy sleep schedule, participating in regular physical activity, and eating nutritious meals are important ways to care for your body and mind. You can also incorporate practices that support mental well-being into your daily routines. Use mealtimes to start a dialogue with youth about stress or practice gratitude as a family. Begin a lesson with a 5-minute breathing exercise or introduce a new coping strategy for students. Start small, and soon, practices that promote mental well-being will become a part of your daily life. [\(1,2,3\)](#)

## 2. REINFORCE HEALTHY VIEWS AND BEHAVIORS

To develop healthy mental well-being strategies, young people need to know that it’s okay for them to share their mental health with you, even when they are struggling. Remember to listen without judgment and respond with empathy and support when they share their feelings.

**2.** You can show young people that you are willing to discuss mental health by talking about your coping strategies when you have difficult emotions. For example, when you get stressed, you might say, “I need some time to calm down, so I’m going to go take a few deep breaths and then come back,” or “I had a tough day, so I’m going on a run because it makes me feel better.” By demonstrating your use of healthy coping strategies, young people will have an example to emulate in the future when they need to navigate difficult emotions or stressful situations. [\(1,4\)](#)

## 3. STRENGTHEN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Healthy social relationships with peers are powerful sources of resiliency and well-being for young people. However, developing strong, meaningful relationships in our busy lives can be difficult. Encourage your young person to regularly spend time with friends and connect to others through recreational activities, mentorship programs, or volunteering. Additionally, young people need strong relationships with supportive adults.

**3.** Make space in your life to spend quality time with young people who matter to you and show them love, acceptance, and trust. Try new activities together as a family, or make an effort to have more open conversations. By building stronger connections, young people will have a network of support to rely on when needed. (2,3)

## 4. SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUILDING A SELF-CARE TOOLBOX

Help the young people in your life learn how to manage their mental well-being and regulate their emotions by building a self-care “toolbox.” Work with your young person to identify and name the coping strategies that work best for them and add them to their own personal “toolbox” they can access whenever they are experiencing stress. Their toolbox can be a physical box full of different strategies and comforting items or a list they maintain in their minds. Share coping strategies that you find helpful, or ones from the list below, with your youth and encourage them to utilize their favorites during stressful situations.

- **Relaxation coping strategies**, like deep breathing exercises, visualizing a calm space, or tensing and relaxing your muscles.
- **Active coping strategies**, like running or walking, dancing, or squeezing a stress ball.
- **Creative coping strategies**, like creating art or music, journaling, or playing with Play-Doh.
- **Social coping strategies**, like calling a friend, sharing your feelings with a trusted person, or playing a game with someone else.
- **Mindset-shifting coping strategies**, like reframing negative thoughts, practicing gratitude, or trying a grounding exercise. (1,5)

## 5. SET BOUNDARIES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Spending excessive time scrolling on social media, playing video games, or being online can detract from your mental well-being. Pay attention to how much you and your young person use technology and what content you consume. Have an honest conversation about whether your social media use is serving your mental health – does the time you spend online take away from healthy activities you enjoy, like seeing friends or participating in an offline hobby? How do you feel when you use social media? After discussing these questions, work together to make a plan for healthy social media use by setting limits and sticking to them. (3)

## 6. SEEK AND BE A SOURCE OF SUPPORT

Remember that no one has to struggle with their mental health alone. There is nothing shameful about seeking out help when you need it. Ask for help from friends and family members and encourage young people to do so as well. Trusted adults outside of the family, like school counselors, coaches, and faith leaders, can also be important sources of support for young people. If you or your young person are distressed, contact a doctor or mental health professional. It takes courage to reach out for support, but it is worth it to take care of our mental health.

Being a source of support for friends and family can also lessen feelings of loneliness. Talk with them about mental health and find a connection through these vulnerable conversations. Volunteer for a local coalition, peer support group, or advisory council on mental health and connect with resources in your community. Remember that you are never alone. (2,3)

## RESOURCES

[Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools](#)

[Prioritize Your Well-Being: Teen Mental Health Online Resources](#)

[Healthy Coping Strategies for Kids and Teens](#)

[31 Tips to Boost Your Mental Health](#)

[Emotional Wellness Toolkit](#)

[How and Why to Practice Self-care](#)



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