



CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

DISCUSSING MENTAL HEALTH WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH



Many youth and parents do not seek the help and support that is needed due to a fear of being labeled or bullied as well as misconceptions about mental health. Therefore, it is imperative to their emotional well-being that adults **create awareness** around mental health. Engaging children and youth in discussions will normalize the expression of emotions and debunk the myths and misconceptions surrounding mental health thereby **decreasing stigma**. Below are some tips and ideas to consider when preparing for a discussion.

Talking Point Tips:

- It is important to acknowledge the maturity level of children and youth:
 - Young children will need concrete examples and explanations. There are many books available (see booklist on our website: <http://fedfamsc.org/event/past-cmhaw-events/2011-2/cmhaw-child-adolescent-book-list-2/>)
 - Late childhood/early adolescent youth will be able to engage in deeper conversation related to the topic.
- Keep in mind the fact that mental health is a sensitive topic:
 - Encourage members to contribute to discussion, but do not push them to engage if they seem uncomfortable.
- Sometimes it is helpful to compare mental health issues with physical health issues.
 - Example: "At some point, everyone gets sick with a cold, but not everyone gets really sick with something serious like pneumonia. People who have a cold are usually able to do their normal daily activities. But if they get pneumonia, they have to take medication and may have to go to the hospital. Mental health is similar to physical health. Feelings of sadness, anxiety, worry, irritability, or sleep problems are common for most people (just like getting a cold). However, these feelings can get very intense, last for a long period of time and begin to interfere with school, work, and relationships for some people, meaning they may be experiencing a mental illness (just like getting pneumonia)."
- "Fact or Fiction" exercise: Compile some questions related to mental health and associated stereotypes to have an opportunity to educate the children and youth as well as debunk common myths.
 - Example:
 - Mental illness is contagious.
False. Mental illness is not contagious. Heredity can, and often does, play a factor in the development of the disease.
 - Mental illness can be cured with willpower.
False. Mental illness is associated with chemical imbalances in the brain and requires a comprehensive treatment plan.
- Famous Figures with mental health issues: This is an excellent way to open conversation. You can ask what the list of figures have in common. It works best when the figures you select are quite different and have very little in common. Below are links to different lists:
 - http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/links_resources/other_resources/famouspeople.pdf