

Hand-out for Parents

HELPING CHILDREN FLOURISH

GOOD MENTAL HEALTH means much more than simply not having a mental illness. It also means feeling mostly happy, peaceful and satisfied about life. It includes feeling a sense of belonging and participating in your community.

Sociologist Corey Keyes, of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, came up with the term *flourishing* to describe these aspects of mental wellness. As parents, we can't control all of the factors that affect our children's mental health. But there are some simple, concrete things we can do to help our children flourish.

Some may seem obvious and some are things you probably already do. Think of this list as a reminder about some of the most important aspects of parenting.

Give your child positive attention. Every child needs and craves attention. If they don't get that attention in positive ways, they'll often find negative ways to get it.

Give your children chances to try new things they've never done before, even though it may be challenging at times.

Help them to see challenges and even failure as experiences we can learn from. One of the most important aspects of being happy – or not – is how we respond to things that go wrong. Children who know how to learn from such experiences have the best chance to lead happy lives.

Help your children pursue their own interests. Following their interests and passions helps children (and adults!) feel engaged with life and also



stimulates positive emotions like curiosity, interest, satisfaction and self-confidence.

Let your children do things for themselves. People who can figure out what they need to do (and how to do it) in various situations have a much stronger sense of control over their lives. The best way to learn is from childhood experience, supported by parents.

Model acceptance of other people. People who accept others tend to be happier

people and they also make the world a better place. The best way for your child to learn is from your example.

Show your children that you believe in their potential, but that you also accept who and what they are right now. Children need to grow and learn, but they also need to know that we love and enjoy them “just the way they are.”

Support their involvement in social activities. Welcome their friends into your home. Social connections – having friends and enjoying other people – is one of our most important sources of life satisfaction and a key way of recovering from stress.

Help them build a sense that they belong – in your family, in your neighbourhood, in group activities or teams, with extended family. One way to develop a sense of belonging is to make a contribution by helping others – at school, in your community or place of worship, or with relatives.

Have good times with them. In families there are lots of things we have to get done that are necessary, but not so enjoyable. Make sure you and your kids also do fun things together.