



WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

ESS1503.1F | First Grade

Series III

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.

An online directory of mental health services in South Dakota, searchable by town, is available at www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org. Other mental health resources are at this site as well. Information can also be obtained by calling 211 in Rapid City or Sioux Falls or calling toll-free 1-877-377-0941 from other areas of South Dakota.

We would appreciate your feedback on this “Wings for Life” newsletter. Please take three minutes to complete the on-line survey: www.seuw.org/wings.aspx

The term “parent” is used throughout this newsletter. It is intended to encompass guardians and primary caregivers as well.

IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

- What is Emotional Wellness?
- Modeling Everyday Actions for Your Children
- Trying New Things
- Giving Children Time to Be Creative
- Benefits of Parent Involvement in School

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.

These parenting guides are a gift to you from the Sioux Empire United Way. They were adapted and written by the South Dakota 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.

For additional resources on children’s mental health, visit www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org.

This is a United Way partner program that connects you to all available services for your family.



South Dakota
Cooperative Extension Service



Sioux Empire United Way

Modeling Everyday Actions for Your Children

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” This common saying can not only be applied to a photograph, but also to actions that become mental pictures in your child’s mind. As children grow they continuously store mental pictures of behaviors from those who surround them, their role models. Role modeling by adults, peers, and others all play a part in the development of your child. However, as a parent you are the main role model for your child.

You are the primary example your child has to follow to learn about how to live her life. Your child sees, takes note, and may replicate in some form nearly all of your actions. These actions (behaviors) may include displays of kindness, compassion, a strong work ethic, eating healthy, community involvement and service, self care, honesty, money management, trust, and belief in faith. Of course, these actions may also include displays involving the inability to handle stress, moodiness, anti-authority attitudes, dishonesty, or aggressiveness.

The best way to help your child become the kind of person you want her to be is to model the desirable behaviors. For example, if you would like your child to show respect toward others, set an example of respect, including your own child. Remember that no matter how many times you tell your child to act in a certain way, your actions really do speak louder than words. Your child is taking note of your actions. Therefore, “do as I say and not as I do” simply does not work.

Use these CHARACTER COUNTS! tips adapted from the Josephson Institute of Ethics to encourage positive behaviors everyday in your child.

BE CONSISTENT

Moral messages you send must be clear, consistent, and repetitive. Everything you say and do, and all that you allow to be said and done in your presence, either reinforce or undermine the credibility of your messages about the importance of good character. When you are tired, rushed, or under pressure, you are most tempted to rationalize. It may help to remember that the most powerful and lasting lessons about character are taught by making tough choices when the cost of doing the right thing is high.

BE CONCRETE

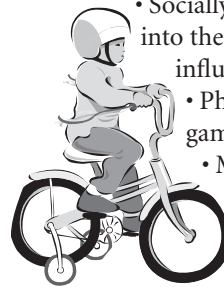
Messages about a good attitude, positive qualities, and conduct should be direct and specific. Building character and teaching ethics is not an academic undertaking—it must be relevant to the lives and experiences of your child. Talk about character and the possible choices in situations that you and your child experience.

BE CREATIVE

Effective character development should be creative. It should be active and involve the child in real decision making that has real consequences (such as teaching responsibility through allocating money from an allowance or taking care of a pet). Games and role-playing are also effective. Look for “teachable moments,” using good and bad examples from TV, movies, and the news.

Trying New Things

As a first grader, your child is experiencing an exciting and important time in his life. Your child has moved from being closely tied to family members to having relationships outside of the family. Your child is encountering new experiences and changes in all areas of development:



- Socially, your child is moving from the family into the world of school friends and the influence of other adults.
- Physically, your child is attempting new games, sports, and physical challenges.
- Mentally, your child is acquiring some adult-like ways of thinking through information, ideas, and ways to communicate.

While this can be a scary time for your child, you have the ability to guide him through his fears or doubts toward confidence and a positive self-concept. Tap into your child’s emergent experiences as a way to introduce him to new ideas, situations, and ways of doing things. In addition to the classroom, provide some opportunities outside of school for your child.

At this stage, a school-ager’s main needs relate to achievement, a sense of self-esteem, and acceptance by friends and important adults. First graders are at the beginning of this stage and are excited about doing, acting, exploring, daring, experimenting, inventing, building, and completing their “work.” Being able to complete tasks helps him build a positive self-concept and confidence.

Although completion of a task is an important aspect of development, it is useful and beneficial to remember that the process of the work may be much more interesting than the end product. Foster your child’s involvement in the process by both supporting his creative approaches and encouraging exploratory behaviors (as long as the behaviors do not put him or anyone else in danger). Be sure to discuss the results even when, or especially when, things do not go as planned. Bear in mind that your child may be both sensitive to

personal criticism and not good at accepting failure. Celebrate your child's successes, but also teach him how to learn from criticism. Ask your child, "Can you figure out how to do it differently next time?"

Forming new relationships is another aspect of trying new things. In elementary school, your child's attachment to friends will grow and, generally, be mostly with children of the same sex. Your child may have a different *best friend* every few days. He may also become attached to an adult, such as teacher, classroom aid, or bus driver. This is a good time to consider membership in clubs or sports teams as a way to further develop your child's positive social development.

Give your child the tools to work through everyday situations that will help him cultivate confidence in himself. You cannot protect your child from disappointments and failure, but you can help him evaluate the process and learn to form important coping skills. Build and reinforce your child's image of himself as creative, cooperative, and independent or self-reliant. Your child's confidence will propel him forward into trying new things and becoming a successful young adult.

Giving Children Time to Be Creative

Play is a cherished part of childhood that offers important developmental benefits, and play offers parents the opportunity to fully engage in spending time with their children. However, multiple forces are interacting to threaten and reduce children's abilities to reap the benefits of play.

Play is an important factor to healthy brain development. Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. Children's play may involve adults, but when play is controlled by adults, children often submit to adult rules and concerns. They lose some of the benefits the play offers, particularly in developing creativity, leadership and group skills.

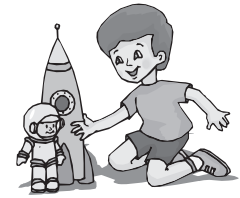
The development of cognitive-thinking skills can come out of made-up games or from writing a story. Creativity has time to flourish during unstructured time spent roaming through the park, sitting under a tree, or curled up in a comfy chair. Unhindered activities allow for kids to break out of restrictive routines and clock watching.

An increasing number of children are becoming so overscheduled that they may consider *downtime* as "boring." Help your child look at unscheduled free time

as his time. Allowing for time to explore one's inner thoughts and imagination helps achieve balance and relieves your child of obligatory activities that may be hindering his creativity.

While your child is young, you can influence how he views his free time. Guide your child in making safe and appropriate choices regarding free time. Offer suggestions, ask questions, and be there to watch over him play.

Ask your child what he wants to play. Let him guide you. For example, let your child tell you the story. You may be surprised at how creative your child really is!



Children often have a "play agenda." They can use play to work through new situations, fears, and concerns. By allowing your child to guide you in his play, you may foster his creativity and, at the same time, learn what concerns he has and what interests him.

Benefits of Parent Involvement in School

Did you know that being involved with your child's education is beneficial for all involved? Parents, students, and teachers, and the relationships connecting the three, are very important in achieving a quality education for your child.

Benefits for Parents

- Parents benefit when there is positive parent-school communication.
 - Teacher/parent interactions can influence the extent and quality of parent/child interactions (with regard to the child's learning).
 - Keep in mind that if parents are only told negative things about their child, parental involvement may be low because the parents may feel they cannot properly help their child.
- Parents benefit from learning about their child's school and its needs.
- Parents will both become more confident about their involvement with the school and develop a sense of appreciation for the role a parent can play in their child's education.

Benefits for Students

- Parental involvement will benefit children and youth by
 - increasing academic achievement,
 - fostering motivation for learning,
 - improving a child's behavior,
 - improving a child's attendance record,

- creating a positive attitude about homework and school.

Benefits for Teachers

- Proper parental involvement will create more time for teachers to focus on teaching.
- By having contact with parents, teachers will learn more about their students as individuals (i.e., student needs and home environments). This information can then be used by the teacher to better meet the individual needs of their students.
- Parents who are involved tend to have a more positive view of the teacher, which can improve teacher morale.

Take the time to learn about your child's teacher and his or her classroom. It is important for all involved.

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Resources

Collaboration for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. www.casel.org.

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

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For information on children's mental health services in South Dakota, www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org.

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Advocating for our children... healthy, educated, safe.