



WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

ESS1503.3F | Third 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.

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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.casel.org/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.



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Decision-making Model

Are you quick at making decisions and then moving on even if there are negative consequences? Or do you make quick decisions and then regret your choices later? Or do you perhaps become stressed and have to mull over decisions for several days? When it comes to making decisions, everyone has a different style. Making decisions about food, clothing, and free time might be easy, while making decisions about your job, car, or a family vacation may be more difficult. Many decisions in life are related to behavior choices and involve our relationships with other people.

For your child, making decisions will be easier and less stressful if you teach her how to do so from the time that she is very young. The decisions do not have to be about big issues; use everyday choices to build her decision-making skills. For breakfast, give your child a choice between orange juice and apple juice. Or let her choose between the striped shirt and the blue shirt to wear to school.

In elementary school, your child will have many opportunities to practice making decisions about everyday things. Be sure to ask your child's teacher if the students have choices about what they do in the classroom. Does your child have a choice between two different types of assignments for some subjects? Does she have choices about what to do at recess time or in selecting food for her lunch in the cafeteria?

Many things influence our ability to make thoughtful decisions:

- We favor what we are familiar with, rather than the unknown.
- People often see only choices that are complete opposites. Consider the options in the middle or compromises
- Opinions of either the media or other people may be driving your decision.
- Sometimes the consequences of a decision are not carefully considered.
- Some decisions are based only on emotions.

You can teach your child some basic steps to follow in making a decision. As an adult, you may not even realize that you are going through these steps in your mind. Helping your child learn the steps in logical decision making will help your child make both big and small decisions for her future.

Five Steps in the Decision-Making Process

1) After you and your child have made clear what decision is to be made, the first part of the process is to brainstorm all the possible things you might choose to do. If your child's best friend is not talking to her, what are the choices? For instance, she could either ask her friend what is wrong or ignore her.

2) Talk about what will happen if your child chooses one of the options you have brainstormed. If your child asks her friend directly, the friend may explain the problem or not answer at all. If your child ignores the problem, it might get worse, or it might blow over.

3) What is the likelihood of each consequence actually happening? If she talks to her friend privately and directly, it is very likely that her friend will tell her what is bothering her. On the other hand, her friend could just ignore her. If she ignores the problem, her friend might become angry about being ignored.

4) How important is each of these consequences? Talking to her friend directly will help your child get the most accurate information about the problem. If your child ignores her friend, they may never be able to fix their friendship.

5) By talking through the issue and examining the choices, you and your child should be able to decide on the best choice, and your child can feel confident that she has examined the possible outcomes. Even if her decision doesn't work out the way she wants it to, she will have considered it carefully and not feel rushed into a decision.

Your child's decisions are going to become more and more important as she grows. As an adolescent, there will be difficult choices about tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use. There will also be decisions about schoolwork, more education after high school, and careers. Give your child many opportunities to make decisions so she can develop the ability to make good choices during her entire life.

Do I Overindulge My Child?

After a long day at work, you walk into the house to find your daughter's toys scattered everywhere. Her shoes are in the middle of the floor, and her juice cup is tipped over beside her. You can either ask your child to clean up her things or you can clean them up yourself. As a parent, you know you need to teach your children. But



you also realize that sometimes children get frustrated when a task seems too big. Thus, it is important to give your children manageable tasks to help them feel a sense of responsibility.

Overindulging children or doing too much for them does not give them a chance to develop a real sense of responsibility and independence. When you give your children opportunities to develop their sense of respon-

sibility, they learn to feel good about themselves. Children who feel good about themselves become confident and independent teens and adults.

You can help your children learn about responsibilities. Overindulgence can occur when a parent does things for a child that the child is capable of doing or when a parent says “yes” every time a child asks for something. Overindulgence can also occur when parents don’t set enough limits for their children and let them do whatever they want.

Some key points about overindulgence:

- Overindulging is different than spoiling—the words are not interchangeable.
- Overindulgence can happen at any income level.
- It is not just about “bad families” or dysfunctional families—all families can be affected.
- It is not just about “stuff” but also about parent-child interactions and expectations.

Overindulgence can take many forms. There are three types of overindulgence. They include 1) giving too much, 2) overnurturing, and 3) being soft or offering too little structure.

Some parents feel guilty about not spending enough time with their children, so they buy them things to make up for it. This kind of overindulgence often happens with divorced parents or parents who work long hours away from home. Some parents are so stressed that they don’t have the energy to handle conflicts, so they give in to a whining child’s whims to keep the peace. Although this stops the whining, it creates a bigger problem.

Parents teach responsibility by having clear and consistent expectations. Children do not need every toy or video game they want. In fact, teaching them to handle small disappointments now can help them handle larger disappointments in the future.

Give children manageable chores and tasks to do at home. If each child has a chance to do this chore, she or he will develop a sense of competence and responsibility for the task. Giving children responsibilities around the house helps them feel like valuable members of the family who contribute to the family’s well-being.

Remind children over and over, about completing a task or help them do it. Either of these approaches helps to show children what you expect. Meeting your expectations helps them develop a sense of accomplishment. This will help your children become responsible, competent, and independent adults.

Purchasing Memories Instead of Things

“I want...” starts many phrases spoken by children. Children are surrounded by things to be purchased. Television commercials, peers, and parents all play roles in the increasingly materialistic attitudes of children. Pressures to have the latest clothing style or hi-tech toy, in order to fit in with their friends and peers, can be quite overwhelming for children. Children may believe that having many possessions will make them happier or make people like them more.

How can parents combat a materialistic world? Here are some ideas.

Make time for family time. Participating in activities with little or no cost emphasizes how it is possible to have fun without spending money. This valuable time also contributes to a child’s sense of belonging and security, which will last far longer than items that are purchased.

Give to others. Instead of emphasizing what your child may gain or possess, place more of an emphasis on helping others.

Be a good role model. Consider your values and your actions. Are you setting a good example? Are you buying everything your child wants? Do you consider purchases thoughtfully? Are your purchases for your children out of need? Desire? Or guilt? Even if you encourage your child to buy things with his own money, be sure to help him evaluate the need for the item.

Teach money management. If your child has an understanding of how to save for something, he may request less of you. If your child is also capable of purchasing items with his own earnings, your child will value those items that much more.

Avoid exposure to advertisements. Commercials are often directed towards children. Advertisers know that children can persuade their parents and grandparents to purchase things for them. Advertisements seek to use a child’s desire to own the newest toy or electronic device to influence the buying behavior of adults.

Here are some good tactics to use with your child to help him examine his motivations for buying. Help your child learn about good buys; help your child learn to be a savvy buyer. Teach him to ask questions before he decides to purchase something.

- Do I really need this, or do I just want it?

- Do I want it because my friends have it?
- If I want it, will I still want it next week, next month, or even next year?
- Does the toy really do what the advertisers say it does? Often, a toy, electronic device, or video game is too good to be true.
- Beyond dollars and cents, what is the cost? How long will I need to save my allowance, or how many times will I have to baby-sit in order to earn the money I need to purchase this item?

For a child to want to keep up with his peers is normal; however, always wanting the latest thing may be a sign of low self-esteem. Help your child examine why he wants a certain toy, item of clothing, or electronic device. Trying to build his self-esteem through “buying more stuff” will only be a temporary solution to a much larger problem.

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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.