

PREPARING YOUR TEEN EMOTIONALLY FOR SCHOOL AND LIFE

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/ID PROGRAM
AUGUST 2018 RESOURCE SHARING

It's clear that adolescents need emotional problem-solving skills to handle challenges. Our children need a toolbox of skills and habits to use when they become stressed or overwhelmed. That happens in life, not just in higher learning.

So how do we prepare our children for the rigors and challenges that life brings?

One answer is teaching them skills derived from Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). DBT was originally designed for adults with borderline personality disorder, who experience extreme emotional instability. But DBT skills are being used successfully to treat almost any kind of emotional dysregulation. Here are some things that fall under DBT skills:

1. Don't try to fix every problem. What teens need to hear, specially when they're feeling depressed, anxious or overwhelmed, is that "It's okay not to feel okay." Validate their feeling but don't solve their problems. Possible responses include. "I'm guessing this is really hard for you." "I see that thinking about that test tomorrow is making you really anxious." Then let them deal with the problem knowing you're there as a support net.

2. Practice mindfulness with your teen (last month's resource sharing topic). Remember, this is the ability to be present in the moment and be nonjudgmental towards yourself and others. This is at the core of DBT. A nonjudgmental reframe would be "Wow I didn't do as well as I wanted on that" rather than "I suck, I'm never going to make it here."

3. Help your child establish good self-care. This means making sure to take care of your body in order to promote the best mood you can. Sleeping enough, exercising, healthy eating and avoiding drugs and alcohol fall into this category.

4. Work on planning and "coping ahead". This includes not only how a task will be completed but planning how they'll handle challenging situations. It's essentially preparing yourself to be equipped emotionally to handle a certain experience.

5. Develop strategies for self-soothing. Develop a plan for what to do when difficult emotions are threatening to take over. They can come up with a written plan that includes weighing the pros and cons and thinking through consequences. The goal is a toolbox of things to try when they are feeling highly emotional or overwhelmed—things that will make them feel better instead of spinning out of control. It could include specific pieces of music, going for a run, or things to touch or smell that have a calming effect.

<https://childmind.org/article/preparing-for-college-emotionally-not-just-academically/>