

Improving Children's Mental Health Through Healthy Encouragement

September 22 2021 4:41 PM



ALTON - During these challenging times with natural disasters and more COVID-19 news, we could all use encouragement to help get us through. Centerstone imagines a great difference could be made by trying to use mindful practices of being more encouraging of others, and says our communities would benefit greatly from that.

Encouragement is really important for everyone, but especially for young children. Children grow up not truly knowing how to process emotions, and all they want from their parents is to feel safe and secure. Structure and consistency look very different

right now because of COVID-19 restrictions with schooling, being exposed, and more. It is good to start by acknowledging children's questions and needs by offering support.

Below are some tips on how to encourage your children in the healthiest of ways:

- Include them in the conversation. There is so much turmoil happening in the world right now. Children just want to be involved. They see you and feel those tensions and might ask questions. It is better to have age-appropriate conversations about what is happening so they can feel better. Kids oftentimes carry inappropriate guilt, and this transparency will open a safe space for them to ask questions and let go of those feelings of guilt.
- Offer reassurances. When tensions are not addressed there are a lot of questions present. Children have wild imaginations and will often fill in the blanks. "You can't promise that everything will be better by a certain date, but you can tell them that everyone is willing to work together to make things better," says Julie Bailey, Clinical Manager at Centerstone.
- Give them praise. Praise helps to boost morale and confidence in children. Hearing the words "I am proud of you" makes any person feel better, but try going a step further by being more specific. Tell a child, "I am really proud of you for getting your schoolwork done" or something specific that focuses on their accomplishments.
- Engage them in their strengths. Kids start to gain confidence when they have something they are good at. Focus on their strengths. Give them projects to do. "You're a really great reader. Can you help us out? Would you be willing to read this book to the other kids?" When you engage kids with their strengths it really makes them feel like they have something valuable to offer.
- Reward when appropriate. Rewards are a very helpful tool in encouragement and are a great way to boost self-esteem. "You have to make sure to carefully balance rewards because if they are given out all the time they will eventually lose their meaning if they feel they are not earning them," says Bailey.

Encouragement can go a long way in boosting a child's mental health and wellbeing. Children who feel encouraged and confident will likely perform better at school, they will participate in clubs or sports, have better relationships with family and peers, and they will be healthier overall.

If you or your children are struggling during these times, contact Centerstone for your mental health needs. Call 1-877-HOPE123 or for more information visit us at centerstone.org.

John Markley serves as Regional CEO in Illinois, serving residents in eastern and southern Illinois through more than 30 locations that provide treatment, support, and

educational programs and services to individuals who have mental health and addiction disorders and specialized services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Centerstone employs over 525 staff in Illinois and serves more than 17,000 individuals annually.

About Centerstone

Centerstone is a not-for-profit health system providing mental health and substance use disorder treatments. Services are available nationally through the operation of outpatient clinics, residential programs, the use of telehealth, and an inpatient hospital. Centerstone also features specialized programs for the military community, therapeutic foster care, children's services, and employee assistance programs. Centerstone's Research Institute provides guidance through research and technology, leveraging the best practices for use in all our communities. Centerstone's Foundation secures philanthropic resources to support the work and mission of delivering care that changes people's lives.