

»» Mental Health Fitness

High School Skills Sheet

High school is a time of transition. Teenagers become more independent and turn toward their friends and peers for guidance and support. It's an exciting time that also comes with complicated, wonderful, confusing, and big emotions.

Sometimes these emotions may be uncomfortable, but feeling them is healthy and important because emotions provide teens with information about themselves and their environment and help them to connect to other people. Learning how to notice, label, and express their feelings helps teens to feel more in control.

Understanding »» Feelings

- Label and name feelings to increase emotional vocabulary AND reinforce that you can feel more than one emotion at a time.
- Make time to check in with your teen and explicitly ask how they are feeling. Start by listening and validating your teen's emotions.
For example: "It seems like you're feeling sad today. Is there anything you want to talk about?"
- Once your teen has identified how they are feeling, ask them how much of that emotion they are feeling on a scale from 1 to 10. They can give you more information about how intense their emotions are.
- Model expressing and validating your own feelings! Discuss and label how you feel, how your body reacts to that feeling, and how much you feel it. It is a great way to normalize all feelings and send the message that feelings are important.

Understanding »» Thoughts

- Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all connected, and it's common for everyone to fall into unhelpful thinking patterns where their thoughts make them feel overwhelmed, anxious, sad or frustrated.
- Help your teen to practice identifying helpful and unhelpful thoughts and describing how their thoughts make them feel.
- If you recognize that your teen is expressing an unhelpful thought, encourage them to replace that thought with a more helpful or realistic thought. Share some ways they can question their thoughts:
 - What are the facts about the situation?
 - What is the evidence that this thought is true or false?
 - What is the worst that could happen? If it does happen, what can you do to handle it?
 - Is this thought kind to you? If not, how can you be fair to yourself?

Managing »» Emotions

- Everyone has urges to act that are caused by big, intense, and uncomfortable emotions. The key is riding out the urge and waiting for big feelings to lessen.
- Teens can ride out big feelings by using their five senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell) to ground to the present.
- Validate emotions! Show that you're listening to what your teen has to say and that you empathize with how they feel. This helps them feel understood and connected to you.
- Model at home healthy ways of tolerating and riding out intense emotions. Encourage your teen to use effective calming strategies that work for them in addition to healthy activities such as going for walks, reaching out to friends, and being active.