

## Questions to help your child better process their emotions *this post may contain affiliate links*

In today's society, parents are faced with the very real probability that their child will someday suffer from a mental health illness.

Statistics showed in 2014, one in every five adults have a diagnosable mental disorder. That's 18.1% of the population. And that was five years ago.

The same can be said for young adults. 20% currently are or will be at some point diagnosed with a mental health illness such as depression, anxiety, or substance use.

The percentage of youth age 8-15 with a diagnosable mental disorder are as follows.

Any disorder - 13.1%

ADHD - 8.6%

Mood disorders - 3.7%

Major depressive disorder - 2.7%

So, what should we as parents do with this information?

Should we sit back, hope, and pray that our kids are mentally healthy? Or is there something we can do to help them accept themselves, better process negative emotions, and learn to navigate through difficulties?

I write a lot here on Word from the Bird about bridging the emotional gap between parents and children so that they can have healthy communication and relationships.

Today, I specifically want to address the things we communicate to our kids that will positively affect them and nurture their emotional and mental health.

**I genuinely believe that when the family unit is healthy, our society can be healthy.**

**Check out this incredible parenting book by Paul David Tripp - [Parenting](#).**

Sometimes our attention as parents misses the emotional mark of our children's needs, to simply providing for them physically. But children need so much more than a hot meal and quick convo at dinner. They need intentionality, and for you to identify with them — empathize with them.

Along with modeling what a healthy person looks like, as parents, we are given the responsibility to help our children navigate their negative emotions.

And even though we may feel helpless, and think that the only way our kids will learn how to do that is with a therapist, we are not helpless, and we can directly influence our children and equip them to thrive emotionally in our culture.

Not to say that your child shouldn't have a therapist or counselor.

There are situations that your child may need outside help.

In fact, it takes humility on a parents part to allow their children a mentor, or other healthy adults in their life, such as a counselor.

Children sometimes will better seek advice from an adult who isn't their parent. So, as they get older, don't discourage other healthy individuals to be a part of their life.

Parenting also includes accepting that you won't always have the answers — and that's okay. What's important is that you do your best to research, understand, and apply everything you can to

better identify with your children, and give them the tools to work through their emotions.

**IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A WAY TO CONNECT WITH YOUR KIDS ON A DEEPER LEVEL, CHECK OUT THIS INCREDIBLE DINNER TALK CARD GAME - [OUR MOMENTS](#) . CONVERSATION STARTERS THAT WILL RESONATE WITH YOUR KIDS FOR EMOTIONAL BONDING AND A GREAT NEUTRAL WAY FOR THEM TO OPEN UP TO YOU. WITH QUESTIONS LIKE "IF YOU WERE A SUPERHERO, WHO WOULD YOU BE?" YOU WILL FIND YOURSELF LAUGHING AND CONNECTING AS A FAMILY IN A UNIQUE WAY.**

WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOUR KIDS ARE UP AGAINST WITH THEIR PEERS, AS WELL AS THE LATEST IS CULTURAL ISSUES - VIDEO GAMES, BULLYING, SOCIAL MEDIA AND PEER PRESSURE? CHECK OUT [AXIS.ORG](#).

**Five questions that help your child feel like they can confide in you.**

### **1. HOW ARE YOU FEELING EMOTIONALLY TODAY?**

I know this sounds simple and obvious, but by asking this question, you may open ample opportunities to develop an honest relationship with your child on a deeper level than, "*Hey, how are you?*"

By addressing the "feelings" and "emotions" with that question, you are communicating to them that they do have feelings and emotions, and it's perfectly okay to feel them. It's showing them empathy, getting down in the pit they are in, and helping them come out of it.

Tell them you notice that they seem a little down and if there is anything you can do to help.

Don't assume something is wrong by saying, "*What's wrong?*" But instead, allow them to share their heart. Tell them you are always there for them and create a non-judgmental space where they can share ANYTHING with you, without punishing them for it.

**If they do open up with you, make sure you don't listen to respond and fix, but rather listen to understand.**

**Sometimes I make the mistake of trying to fix a bad situation for my son right after he tells me what happened, thinking the reason he told me was because he wanted my advice.**

But if you see that your child needs help or direction, ask them if it's okay that you give your advice. Don't just force your opinions down their throat.

*Say, "Oh man, I'm so sorry you're going through that. I am here for you. I love you. Would you like to know what I would do in this situation?"*

And if they don't want that, then leave it. Them knowing that you are there for them is sometimes enough to be able to navigate through that difficult circumstance.

Check out [my life journals for kids](#) - an interactive and creative way for your child to learn how to better navigate their emotions.

## **2. What would you like to do with me today?**

So many times, my 8-year-old asks me this question. I've observed that if I ask it first, his world lights up and he is SO excited that I thought of it first. Asking your kids questions they ask you, show that you identify WITH them and want to take the initiative.

**Time spent together as a family is one of the most important things you can do as a parent. But make sure it's intentional. That means you don't check your phone or do something YOU want to do.**

Even if it's 15 minutes of intentional time doing something they love, it will mean the world to them. If you can't do 15 minutes of intentional time with your child daily, then I would suggest you move things around and find the time.

I don't say that in a judgmental way, but mentally caring for your child will always require time spent with them. It's just that simple.

## **3. What happened today that made you smile or laugh, or ...**

You fill in the blank. Asking your child these questions that will not end in a yes or no, will help them think about the answer, instead of quickly responding with a "NO."

When I ask my son this after school, he sometimes has an answer, but not always. The point is that you care. You care to know about his day. You care to know if they were treated unkindly. You care to know that they felt safe.

Your children need to know you care, even about the most minute, mundane, and sometimes ridiculous events of their adolescent life.

I think my son has now told me ten times that this girl at school has a crush on him. And every time he tells me, I am interested and ask more questions.

Having an emotionally healthy relationship with your children requires patience and the understanding that you sometimes hold their little heart in your hands. Be ever so careful with it.

#### **4. What are you thankful or grateful for today?**

Along with asking the questions that are good conversation starters, it's vital that you help them see the good things that happen in their life.

**In western civilization, kids are unfortunately unaware of what they have, and VERY aware of what they don't have.**

So how do we raise kids who are content, and grateful? Well, along with being grateful and content yourself as to model for them what that looks like, you can ask them for what they are thankful for daily.

For some reason in our family, the best communicative moments are at bedtime.

Our family believes in God, so this might look different for you than it does for us. But we ask our son to think about three things he's grateful for, either from that day, or in general, and then we pray together, and he tells God thanks for all those things.

We don't force him to pray, but rather encourage it. If he doesn't feel like praying, we leave it. We don't want him to pray because we want him to pray, but rather because he wants to — this nurtures his spiritual life, and helps him understand what a healthy relationship with God looks like.

We point him to the truth, but then let him make a choice.

#### **5. Is there anything you want to tell us that might be hard to say?**

We don't usually ask this every day, but instead when he looks like he's a bit down or sad about something.

We have created for our child a safe zone. In our conversations, we want our kids to know that we don't judge them, that we are always on their side, and we want the best for them.

Naturally, things will happen in your child's life that are surprising, unfortunate, or things you wished you could have changed for them. But the important thing is to create a space where they feel free to share those things.

Wouldn't you rather your child feels safe to share the bad stuff instead of hiding it from you? To do that, you must give them grace. If they share with you something sensitive that was hard for them to say, then reward that, don't punish it.

By saying "*that might be hard to say*" you acknowledge that they might have a hard time saying it, and that's okay.

They need to know you are safe to share their deepest and darkest, without judgment, without condemnation.

### **In summary**

As parents, we want to be the safe place our kids go to share their hearts, difficulties, and emotions. To nurture their heart's means to identify with them and give them the freedom to fail.

Just as we aren't perfect individuals, they aren't either.

**They don't need a hero to swoop in and save them from every difficult circumstance. They don't need a judge and jury to sentence them because of the mistakes they've made. They need a safe zone to be who they are, and a shepherd to guide them through the painful emotions or circumstances that might come their way.**