

GOOD MENTAL HEALTH FOR PARENTS

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A reasonable indicator of good mental health is when we feel we are processing day-to-day events in a timely manner, at an expected level and without feeling negatively stressed. Of course there will be times when 'the rush is on' and we become fearful that we will not be able to complete the task. Mental stress can be positive and it can be negative. Positive stress is when we are excited e.g. getting married, moving house, having a baby or winning an event or competition. However, these exciting events can still be stressors.

Negative stress can be long or short term. Long-term stress is when we are under ongoing pressure, strain, worry or fear e.g. working for an unreasonable boss, being in a strained marriage, worrying over such things as finances, ill health, teens getting into trouble, or fear due to spouses being deployed in war zones. Short-term negative stress relates to specific situations. When we are frightened for our safety, our automatic 'fight and flight' system kicks in. It shoots adrenalin through the body, sharpens our vision, sends our oxygenated blood to the most needed organs and brain tissue, and dulls pain so that we can get out of danger. It is preparing us to run for our lives.

Our brains are precious and need to be protected from as much stress as possible. When parents are stressed out, their children often don't feel cared for or secure. Kids' minds need to be protected from the negative and violent junk that comes through movies, TV, and video games. Parent relationship hassles that are aired vociferously tend to unsettle children and this creates fear. Images and experiences are not easily erased and can play out through a person's entire life time.

Our brains need to be fed well to keep them healthy. When we do not eat a well-balanced diet that includes raw fruit and plenty of vegetables, what are we eating instead? We live in a generation where 'we want it all and we want it now'. That means we often don't want to stop and prepare healthy meals. The tendency is to want tasty foods that are going to fill us up quickly...fast foods full of fats and carbohydrates. When we are not doing enough exercise to burn off these calories two things happen. We tend to become flabby and overweight. Lack of agility often causes us to seek sedentary activity. Eating and drinking carbonated drinks is a pleasant pastime while sitting. Research shows that one of the ingredients in carbonated diet drinks replaces the synaptic fluid between nerve endings, causing short-term memory loss. If we feel stodgy then we often think in the same manner.

With so much of the visual media being just mindless fodder, we don't have to process any information. It merely entertains us. In contrast to this, physical play helps kids develop their imaginations. Remember when we used to

make huts in trees, and take our dolls shopping? We had all sorts of adventures when we had to make up our games. Our brains need positive stimulation and this can be achieved by exercising our imaginations and by being proactive - making plans and setting goals.

Our mental health will be enhanced when we eat healthy foods, get appropriate rest, exercise regularly and protect our brains from over stimulation and stress. We owe it to our children and we need to ensure that they are going to develop healthy minds, bodies and spirits.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.