



# Talking to Your Child About Difficult Topics

---

2024

**Liz Colizza, MAC, LPC, NCC**  
Director of Research & Programs

**Laura Magnuson, MS, MA, LAMFT**  
VP of Clinical Engagement

# Agenda



- Your Role & Work as a Parent
- Your Child's Brain
- Showing Up Emotionally
- Ongoing Conversations to Have
- Phrases & Questions to Use
- Recognizing Early Warning Signs & Symptoms of Mental Health Challenges
- What to Say in a Crisis
- Q&A

**The way we talk to our children becomes their  
inner voice.**

- Peggy O'Mara

# Understanding the Youth Mental Health Crisis

*“Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real and widespread. Even before the pandemic, an alarming number of young people struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide —and rates have increased over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic further altered their experiences at home, school, and in the community, and the effect on their mental health has been devastating. The future wellbeing of our country depends on how we support and invest in the next generation.”*

**Surgeon General Vivek Murthy**



# Your Role as a Parent

- Attune to their world
- Respond to their needs
- Emotionally engage with them
- Regulate your emotions and help them regulate theirs
- Show them that you are strong enough for all of their big emotions
- Take responsibility and repair when you do harm

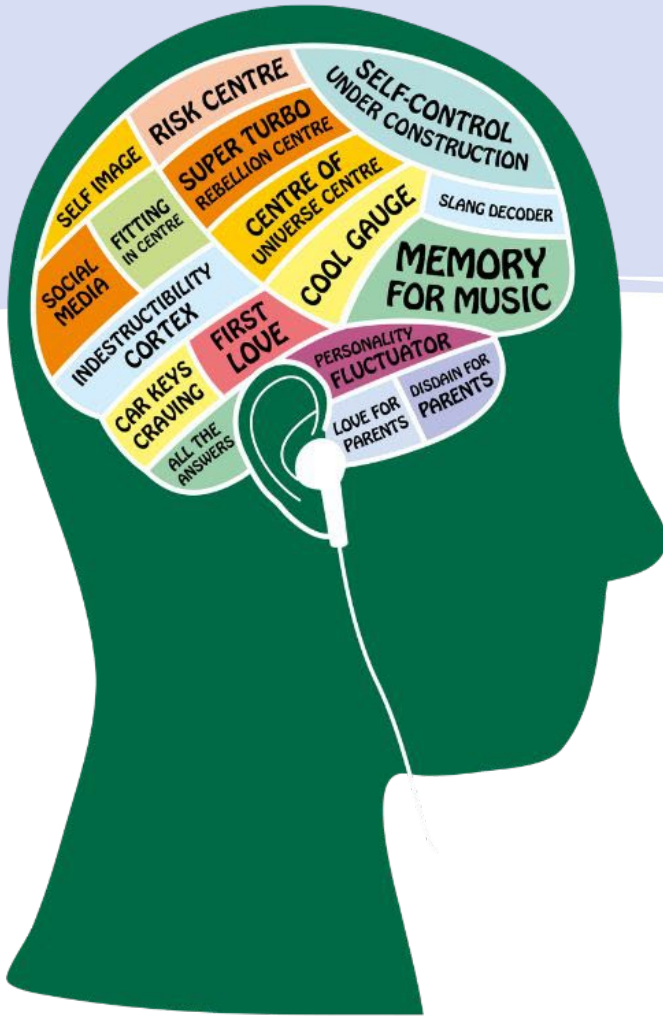


# Self-Reflection Exercise

- How does curiosity feel for you as a parent?
- How much self-compassion do you have?
- What unmet needs do you have from childhood?
- What are your triggers as a parent?



# Parent's view of teenage brain





# Your Child's Brain: Under Construction

## Prefrontal cortex

Its functions include planning and reasoning grows until 25 years

**Adults:** Fully developed

**Teens:** Immature, prone to high-risk behaviour

**Kids:** Developing; sometimes online

## Amygdala

Emotional core for passion, impulse, fear, aggression

**Adults:** Rely less on this, use prefrontal cortex more

**Teens:** More impulsive

**Kids:** Very active amygdala



## Parietal Lobe

Responsible for touch, sight, language: grows until early 20s

**Adults:** Fully developed

**Teens:** Do not process information effectively

**Kids:** In process of developing; sensory input very important

## Ventral Striatum

Reward centre, not fully developed in teens

**Adults:** Fully developed

**Teens:** Are more excited by reward than consequence

**Kids:** Immediate reward focus

## Hippocampus

Hub of memory and learning; grows in teens

**Adults:** Fully functional loses neurons with age

**Teens:** Tremendous learning curve

**Kids:** Explicit memory starting around 4-5 years old; Implicit memory since in utero

# How to Emotionally Show Up for Your Child

- View behaviors as emotional signals
- Warm, open body language
- Safe, comforting physical touch
- Ride emotional waves with them
- Get on their eye level
- Ask open-ended questions
- Get curious and withhold judgment
- Listen reflectively
- Repeat back
- Validate emotions
- Use 'and' in your teaching
- Keep teaching to 1-2 points
- Use scripts that fit your family values

# Ongoing Conversations to Have with Your Child

- Family Values
- Respect and Boundaries
- Love and Attraction
- Sex
- Puberty and Changing Bodies
- Healthy Relationships
- Honesty and Trust
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Money and Finances
- Internet, social media, digital footprint

*WHAT WOULD YOU ADD  
TO THIS LIST?*

# Practical Tips for Hard Conversations

- Start having them early and often; normalize them
- Use less pressure situations; driving in the car
- Acknowledge the awkwardness of it
- Use scripts; You will never get in trouble for telling the truth. You can tell me anything.
- Give options; We can talk about it now or later
- Practice and plan
- Withhold judgment
- Get curious with them

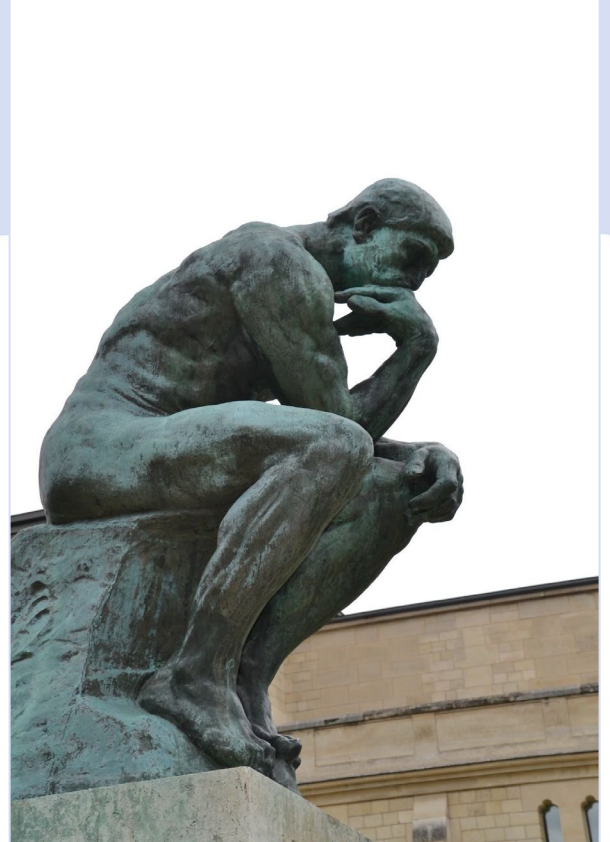


# Questions and Phrases to Use

- I've noticed that you've been ... Are you doing okay?
- I'm here for you if you want to talk.
- It makes sense that you feel ...
- That's really hard.
- What was that like for you?
- I'm wondering how you are doing with...?
- What do you think about...?
- It sounds like you've been stressed lately. Do you want to talk about what's going on?
- I love you and I can't let you hurt me.
- It looks like you are feeling something big.  
Do you know what's going on in your body?
- What do you think would help your body to calm down?
- What is your body telling you?
- What's helped in the past when you've felt this way?
- I can see that you don't want to talk right now. I'll come back and check on you in 15 min

# Self-Reflection Exercise

- What conversation(s) do you need to have with your kid?
- When is the next time you can bring it up?
- How do you want to bring it up?
- What do you want to make sure your child hears from you?
- What question(s) will you ask them?



# Navigating Adolescence: Understanding Typical Development and Behaviors in Teens

- Physical changes and growth spurts
- Abstract and logical thinking development
- Self-Identity and Self-esteem
- Emotional and intellectual capacity
- Peer relationship focus
- Interest and awareness in intimate relationships
- Future focus development



# Behavioral Warning Signs: Recognizing Behaviors that may Indicate Concern or Need for Support

- Sudden, abrupt changes in personality
- Expressions of hopelessness and despair
- Declining grades and school performance
- Lack of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Increased irritability and aggressiveness
- Withdrawal from family, friends, and relationships
- Lack of hygiene
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Suspected chemical/substance use



# Warning signs: considerations of suicide

In early 2021, emergency department visits in the United States for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher for adolescent girls and 4% higher for adolescent boys compared to the same time period in early 2019.

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others

- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings

# What to say when there's a crisis:

- *I hear how awful that must be for you.*
- *I'll bet that brought up some difficult feelings.*
- *It's okay to cry.*
- *I'm here for you.*
- *Tell me what reasons you want to die?*
- *What reasons do you want to live?*
- *That sounds really difficult.*
- *Is there anything I can do to help?*
- *It sounds like you're in real distress.*
- *It sounds like you're having a crisis.*
- *It sounds like you're very upset.*

# What not to say during a crisis

- *Just stop it.*
- *Give it time and it will pass.*
- *Tell them to stop thinking about the past.*
- *Try to relate to them by comparing what they are telling you to your own experience like the time when your purse was stolen or you went through your divorce.*
- *Use what they are saying as an invitation to talk about how bad you're feeling.*
- *Tell them that everything happens for a reason.*

# You Don't Have To Wait For A Crisis Intervention





# Prioritizing Your Kid's Mental Health

## Therapy Can Help:

- Accessing skilled guidance
- Gaining new perspectives
- Learning new coping skills
- Building healthy behaviors
- Adjusting unhealthy thoughts
- Practicing emotional regulation
- Put words to experiences



# How can adults be supportive of young people

- Be the best role model you can be for young people by taking care of your own mental and physical health
- Help children and youth develop strong, safe, and stable relationships with you and other supportive adults
- Encourage children and youth to build healthy social relationships with peers
- Do your best to provide children and youth with a supportive, stable, and predictable home and neighborhood environment

- Ensure children and youth have regular check-ups with a pediatrician, family doctor, or other health care professional
- Look out for warning signs of distress, and seek help when needed
- Minimize children's access to means of self-harm, including firearms and prescription medications
- Be attentive and involved with children and youth spend time online

# Resources

## Teens - Talkspace Blog

### Example Articles:

- [Your Teen Needs Someone to Talk to \(Even If It's Not You\)](#)
- [How to Help a Teenager with Suicidal Thoughts](#)
- [Social Anxiety in Teens: Signs & Symptoms](#)

**talkspace** CLIENT LOGIN

## Getting started with therapy

Talkspace is a digital space for private and convenient mental health support. With Talkspace, students are matched with a recommended, licensed provider based on their preferences, and can receive support day and night from the convenience of their device (iOS, Android, and Web).

### How it works

Within days of completing registration, a teen can begin to exchange unlimited asynchronous messages (text, voice, and video) with a dedicated therapist. Live sessions can also be scheduled. Therapists often work five days per week, sometimes including weekends.

The student will continue to work with the same therapist throughout their journey. However, they are always welcome to switch providers so they can find the perfect fit. Talkspace's clinical network features thousands of licensed, insured, and verified clinical professionals with specialties ranging from behavioral to emotional and wellness needs, including:

#### List of specialties

✓ Family issues	✓ Suicidal thoughts/ideation	✓ Tech habits	✓ Focus/distractions
✓ Health/fitness/sports	✓ Tragic events/natural disasters	✓ Eating disorders	✓ Healthy dating
✓ Peer pressure	✓ Sleeping habits	✓ College admissions	✓ Social media literacy

Talkspace therapy works by helping teens process their emotions and experiences and develop positive coping strategies. In a study of 10,000 member participants, 70% experienced significant symptom improvement and 50% fully recovered after 12 weeks of regular engagement with their Talkspace therapist.

#### Ready to get started

1. Visit [talkspace.com/organization](https://talkspace.com/organization)
2. Custom instructions to enter here (ie Register with school email)
3. Complete our QuickMatch™ provider finder tool to review your best match
4. Begin messaging in your private digital care room, or schedule a live session

#### Parental consent guidelines by state:

1. Students age 13 parental consent required: NM, PA, VA, WA, WI, AL, HI
2. Students age 13-14 parental consent required: CO
3. Students age 13-15 parental consent required: SC, KY, MT, IL, TN, MD
4. For all other states, students age 17 and under do not require parental consent

9:41

## Finding the right

begins with  
u to therapy  
about you  
achieve.

9:41 25:03

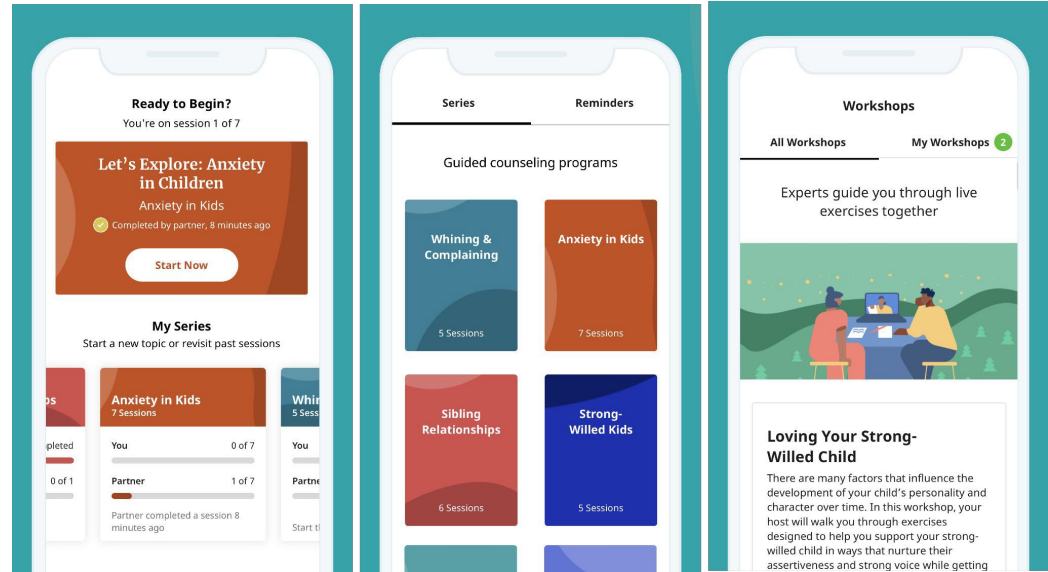




# Lasting Parenting Guide App

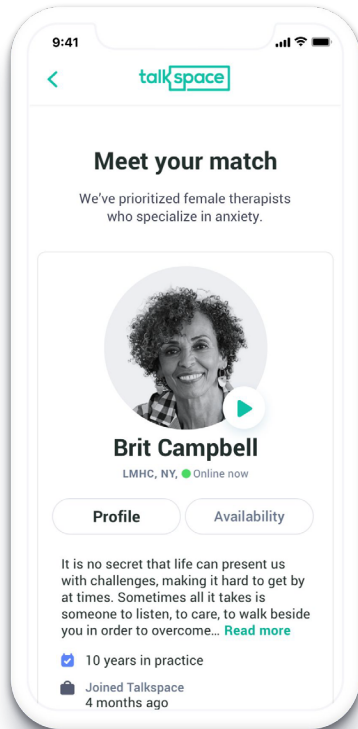
## Research-based parenting support

Lasting empowers parents to become more confident in their approach to parenting. Through self-guided sessions and live classes, you'll receive support on topics like anxiety in kids, sibling conflict, secure attachment, and much more.



# Talkspace Therapy: Quick Access to a Dedicated Provider

*The average wait time for in-person care can be as long as 6 weeks*



## Matching

Available therapists via QuickMatch™ based on member preferences

Communicate within days with dedicated therapist

8/10 members stay with first selected therapist

## Modality

Unlimited messaging exchanges- text, video, audio

Scheduled live sessions- chat, audio, video

Desktop/mobile app available

## Engagement

Daily responses during business hours, and in-app scheduler

Clinical progress tracker shares diagnostic details

2+ months avg. member engagement

**50% recover and 70% improve in 12 weeks**

**Questions?**

# Thank you!

