



Family Access Guide to Mental Health

**Center for Adoption Support & Education
Oklahoma Department of Mental Health
and Substance Abuse Services
Oklahoma Family Network**



What do we mean by our mental health?

What Is Mental Health?

Mental health is about how we think, feel, and act. It affects how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Just like we take care of our bodies, we also need to take care of our minds!

Why Does It Matter?

Mental health is important for everyone in the family—kids, parents, and caregivers. When we feel good inside, it helps us:

- ✓ Get along with others
- ✓ Handle tough times
- ✓ Enjoy school, work, and family time
- ✓ Make good choices

Signs Someone May Need Mental Health Support

Everyone feels sad, worried, or angry sometimes. But if these feelings last a long time or make daily life hard, it may be time to ask for help. Some signs include:

- 🔴 Feeling sad or angry most of the time
- 🔴 Having trouble sleeping or eating
- 🔴 Not wanting to do things you used to enjoy
- 🔴 Feeling alone, even with family and friends

How Families Can Support Mental Health

- ♥ **Talk and Listen:** Let everyone share their feelings without judgment.
- ♥ **Create a Routine:** Regular meals, sleep, and fun time together help everyone feel safe.
- ♥ **Stay Active:** Exercise and fresh air are great for the mind and body.
- ♥ **Ask for Help:** It's okay to reach out to a doctor, counselor, or teacher for support.





Mental health is just as important as physical health. Taking care of our minds helps the whole family feel happier and stronger!



Who Can Help with Mental Health?




Who is in My Corner?

You're not alone. There are lots of caring people who can help you and your family feel better. Here are some of the helpers:

-  **Therapists & Counselors** – They talk with kids and grown-ups about feelings and help solve problems.
-  **Doctors & Psychiatrists** – They check how the brain is working and may suggest medicine if needed.
-  **School Counselors & Social Workers** – They help with feelings, school struggles, and family challenges.
-  **Helplines & Crisis Services** – They're there when someone needs help right away.

How Can I Find the Right Mental Health Support?

It can feel confusing to know where to start, but you don't have to figure it out alone. Here's what you can do:

-  **Talk to Someone You Trust** – A parent, teacher, doctor, or school counselor can help guide you.
-  **Check with Your Doctor** – They can connect you with a therapist, counselor, or other mental health services.
-  **Look at Your Insurance or Benefits** – If you have health insurance, check what's covered. Some programs offer help for free or at low cost.

When Should Families Ask for Help?

If someone in your family feels sad, worried, or stressed for a long time, that's a sign it might be time to get support. Getting help early can make things better at home, at school, and in everyday life.

If you need help right away, you can call a crisis line or visit a website for fast support.

 Contact 988 or visit <https://988oklahoma.com/> for more information.

You don't have to do this alone—there are people in your corner, ready to help.

Systems of Care

Oklahoma Systems of Care is a state-wide collaborative network involving members of local communities, organizations, agencies, facilities, centers and groups that serve the needs of children, youth, and young adults.

[REFER SOMEONE TO TREATMENT >](#)



<https://oklahoma.gov/odmhsas/treatment/children-youth-treatment-services/systems-of-care.html>

Wraparound and Coordinated Services

There are many approaches and supports used within a Systems of Care network, from community resources and services like therapy and counseling, to coordinated supports from teachers and neighbors. Wraparound is one process used within Systems of Care to help stabilize families in crisis.

Families participating in Wraparound work with a team to develop an individualized plan of care using strength-based approaches that allow family members to be heard and address their own needs using resources and supports in their local community.

[FIND SERVICES NEAR YOU >](#)



<https://oklahoma.gov/odmhsas/treatment/children-youth-treatment-services/systems-of-care/wraparound-and-coordinated-services.html>



How can I get the right mental health support for my family?

Who Really Gets What My Family Is Going Through?

If you're in foster care, adopted, or living with relatives, you might carry a lot—sadness, worry, anger, confusion, or even questions that feel too big to ask. That's more than okay. It's real. And you're not alone.

There are people out there who truly understand what it's like to walk in your shoes. They've trained to listen without judgment, to support without assumptions, and to help you and your family feel seen, heard, and understood. You deserve care that meets you where you are—and helps you move forward with strength.

Why See an NTI-Trained Therapist?

Some therapists go through special training called NTI (National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative). That means they really understand what it's like for kids and teens in foster care, adoption, or kinship care.

NTI-trained therapists know how to:

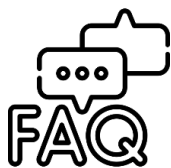
- ✓ Listen to what you're feeling without judgment
- ✓ Help with big feelings like grief, fear, or anger
- ✓ Make therapy feel safe, respectful, and just for *you*

How Do I Find the Right Support?

- ◆ **Talk to a Trusted Adult** – Ask a caseworker, foster parent, relative, or teacher to help you find a therapist who gets it.
- ◆ **Look for NTI-Trained Therapists** – Visit adoptionssupport.org to find someone who's trained to help kids like you.
- ◆ **Ask at School** – A school counselor or social worker can help connect you to care.
- ◆ **Call a Helpline** – If things feel too hard right now, there are crisis hotlines where caring adults are ready to talk and help.

You Deserve to Be Heard

You and your story matter. The right support can help you feel seen, heard, and strong.



For Caregivers with Questions about Mental Health Support for Their Children

How do I know if my child needs mental health support?

All kids have big feelings sometimes—that’s part of growing up. It’s okay for kids to have tough days, but sometimes there are signs they might need extra support. Here are some things to watch for:

- Feeling really sad for a long time and not getting back to their usual self
- Getting angry, frustrated, or upset more than usual
- Worrying all the time or seeming really nervous
- Having a hard time paying attention or staying focused
- Big changes in sleeping or eating—like sleeping too much or not at all, or not wanting to eat
- Not wanting to hang out with friends or do things they usually enjoy

You don’t have to figure this out alone. If something doesn’t feel right, it’s okay to ask for help. Start by talking to your child’s doctor, a school counselor, or a mental health professional. They can help you understand what’s going on and what kind of support might help your child feel better.

What do I do first if I think my child needs mental health support?

A good first step is to talk with your child’s doctor. They know your child and can help figure out what kind of support might help. The doctor might suggest talking to a therapist or joining a program that supports kids and families. If needed, they can also connect you with a specialist—like a child psychologist or psychiatrist—who works with kids and teens.

Getting help early can really make a difference. You don’t have to wait until things get worse. It’s always okay to ask questions and reach out for support—you’re not alone in this.

Someone said my family could get “wraparound” care. What does that mean, and how can it help?

Wraparound care means you get a whole team of people working together to support your child—and your whole family. This team might include a therapist, a care coordinator, school staff, or others who know how to help kids and families.

They’ll listen to what matters most to you and help build a plan that fits your family’s needs. That might include things like family counseling, help with school, learning new skills, or finding local resources. Wraparound care is all about helping your family feel supported, connected, and strong—at home, at school, and in the community.

Will my child need medicine, and how does it help?

For some kids, medicine can be part of what helps them feel better—especially for things like depression, anxiety, or ADHD. If medicine is suggested, a doctor who works with kids (like a child psychiatrist) will explain how it works and check in regularly to make sure it's helping.

The doctor may need to adjust the medicine over time to find what works best. They'll also watch for any side effects. Medicine is often used along with therapy, and together they can make a big difference. You'll be part of every decision, and your voice matters the whole way through.

What if my child doesn't want to go to therapy?

It's normal for kids to feel unsure or nervous about starting therapy. You can help by letting them know that therapy is a safe space where they can talk and be heard. Explain that the therapist is there to help them feel better—not to judge or get them in trouble. Be patient, listen to how they feel, and remind them they don't have to do this alone. You can also ask the therapist for tips to help your child feel more comfortable getting started.

How will I know if the services are working?

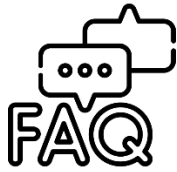
It can take time, but you should begin to notice small, positive changes. Your child might talk more about their feelings, handle stress a little better, or do better at home, school, or with friends. Every child's path is different, so regular check-ins with your child's therapist or doctor can help make sure things are on track—and adjust the plan if needed. You're part of the team, and your input matters.

What should I do if my child is in crisis?

If your child is in danger of hurting themselves or someone else, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away. If it's serious but not an emergency, call your child's doctor or therapist as soon as possible. They can help you figure out the next steps, like a hospital visit or more support. It can feel scary, but you're not alone—help is out there, and acting quickly can make a big difference.

Who Can Help if I'm Stuck?

Natural supports are the people and places in your child's life that offer care and encouragement—like family, friends, teachers, coaches, or church groups. These connections can be just as powerful as professional help. Spending time with people who listen, care, and believe in your child can help them feel stronger and more supported. Don't be afraid to lean on your community—it really does take a village.



Questions about the Different Places for Mental Health Support

When your child needs mental health care, it's important to know about the different types of care available. This helps you choose the best care for your child's needs. Here's a simple guide to understanding how much support is given in different places:

What kind of mental health care might my child need?

When your child needs mental health support, it helps to understand the different kinds of care available. Some kids need just a little support, while others may need more. Here's a simple guide to help you know what each level of care means:

What is Outpatient Therapy?

This is the most common kind of care. Your child sees a therapist once or twice a week for about 45–50 minutes. It can happen at a clinic, hospital, or office. This is a good choice if your child is doing okay with school and daily life but needs help with things like anxiety, sadness, or behavior.

What is an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)?

If your child needs more help than regular therapy, an IOP could be a good fit. Your child goes to therapy a few hours a day, several days a week. They still live at home and can often keep going to school. IOPs give extra support while still letting kids stay in their usual routines.

What is a Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP)?

In a PHP, your child goes to a hospital or clinic during the day—usually 6 to 8 hours—then comes home at night. This is for kids who are really struggling and need more support than an IOP, but who don't need to stay overnight in the hospital.

What is a Residential Treatment Center?

Here, your child stays at a special place full-time for a few weeks or months. They get daily therapy, support, and a safe space to learn new skills. This is helpful for kids who need a lot of help and a break from home or school while they work on feeling better.

What about a Hospital Stay?

This is the highest level of care. If your child is in danger of hurting themselves or others, or going through a very serious mental health crisis, they may need to stay in a hospital. These stays are usually short—3 to 7 days—but can be longer if needed. The main goal is to keep your child safe and help them stabilize.

Can I do anything on my own to help?

Yes! Taking care of your child's mental health starts at home too. This is called self-care, and it's important for the whole family.

Here are some ideas:

- Make time for rest and play
- Try to keep a daily routine with meals, sleep, and quiet time
- Help your child do things they enjoy, like art, music, or sports
- Caregivers—don't forget to take care of yourselves too! Get sleep, eat well, and find time to relax

When families care for themselves, it helps everyone feel stronger. You're not alone—there are people and supports out there to walk this path with you.



Grief Happens: Questions Families Often Ask

Is it normal to feel lots of different feelings after losing someone?

Is It Normal to Feel So Many Different Emotions After Losing Someone?

Yes—it's completely normal. When someone you love is gone, your heart can feel like it's riding a rollercoaster. You might feel sad, angry, confused, numb—or even okay for a little while, and then not okay again. Grief is personal. There's no “right” way to feel, and no single path through it. What matters most is knowing you're not alone.

For youth and families with experiences in foster care, adoption, or kinship care, grief can be especially complex. Loss may come in many forms—separation from birth family, changes in placements, or even the loss of identity or connection. That's why it's important to have support from professionals who are trained in **adoption competency** and understand the layered emotions that come with these experiences.

How long does grief last?

There's no set timeline. Some people begin to feel better after a few weeks, while others need months or even longer. Grief doesn't follow a schedule—and that's okay. Missing someone deeply, even long after they're gone, is part of love. Healing takes time, and having support along the way makes all the difference.

For those impacted by child welfare systems, grief may resurface at different stages of life. Adoption-competent therapists recognize these patterns and offer tools to help navigate them.

When does grief become a mental health concern?

Grief is part of healing, but sometimes it can turn into a bigger problem. If sadness or other feelings last a very long time and make it hard to do everyday things—like going to school, eating, or sleeping—it's important to ask for help. A doctor or counselor can support you.

What helps when someone in the family is grieving?

Grieving families need time, kindness, and connection. Here are a few things that help:

- Talking about the person or thing you lost
- Sharing memories together
- Keeping routines as best as you can
- Letting everyone grieve in their own way
- Reaching out to a counselor, therapist, or support group if it feels too heavy to carry alone

How can I let my child know it's okay to grieve?

Be open and gentle. Let them know it's okay to cry, to ask questions, or even to not feel anything right now. You might say, *"It's okay to miss them. I miss them too."* When kids see that grown-ups have big feelings too, it helps them feel safer sharing their own.

Children and youth with lived experience in foster care or adoption may grieve differently—and may need extra reassurance that their feelings are valid. Adoption-competent care helps families navigate these conversations with empathy and understanding.

How can grief be different for kids in foster care or adoption?

Kids in foster care or adoption may feel grief not just from losing someone, but also from big changes in their family or home. They might miss their birth family, their old home, or the life they knew before. These feelings are real and important. It's okay for kids and families to talk about these feelings and get support to help heal.

- **Ambiguous Loss:** Children may grieve people they've lost without closure—birth parents, siblings, or caregivers they were separated from—without knowing where they are or why the separation occurred.
- **Multiple Layers of Grief:** Grief may not be tied to one event, but to a series of transitions—multiple placements, fractured relationships, or loss of cultural identity.
- **Delayed or Disguised Grief:** Some children may not show grief immediately. It may surface as anger, withdrawal, or behavioral challenges, especially when they feel safe enough to express it.
- **Identity-Linked Grief:** Children may grieve not just people, but parts of themselves—names, histories, or cultural ties that were lost or changed through adoption or foster care.
- **Fear of Rejection:** Expressing grief might feel risky to children who fear being misunderstood, judged, or abandoned again.

Responding with empathy, curiosity, and patience helps build trust. Let your child know that all feelings are welcome, and that healing doesn't follow a fixed timeline. Your presence, validation, and willingness to sit with their emotions are powerful tools in supporting their journey.

Resource Links for more information.

Finding a NIT therapist -

<https://adoptionssupport.org/>

For more mental health information -

<https://oklahoma.gov/odmhsas.html>