

MESSAGES for PARENTS (as told by professionals in the field of Behavioral Health):

1. Do not disregard your child's concern with phrases such as "Just get over it," "Suck it up," "Everyone gets bullied," "You're just looking for attention." Such feedback is not helpful and can in fact be harmful.
2. Parents should hold onto hope that their child can learn, grow, find appropriate support and MOVE THROUGH the challenging time in which they find themselves at a given time. In other words, parents should not despair that their child will "NEVER" move through a challenging moment in time to a place where they are healthier.
3. Parents should teach their children to have hope because CHILDREN CAN IMPACT THEIR OWN MENTAL HEALTH.
4. Emotional pain and illnesses are very similar to physical ones-sometimes there can be mild, transient and self-resolving problems just as your child may have a stomach ache after eating too much or getting a mild stomach bug. But if the problem is persistent, severe or disrupts functioning then you should get professional help.

As a corollary to this, parents should "trust their guts." If they are worried about their child, speak to someone who can provide guidance.

5. Take it seriously! Be sensitive to the issues your child brings to you.
6. Behavioral health issues may present themselves in subtle ways. It is not always obvious, such as a teenager locking themselves in their room and crying for hours. Parents must pay attention and not only look for obvious signs of problems.

Also, seek help for your child! It is NOT a reflection of you or your parenting if your child is struggling.

7. There is no shame in seeking help for your children.
There is hope if your child is diagnosed with a mental illness.
8. Parents are often dismissive of children's mental health, often attributing issues to "normal growth/acting out." Sometimes, behavior is outside of normal development and children need HELP, not just to be blamed for being unruly children.
9. Behavior is a form of communication. Try to look for the message and tend to that, rather than just reacting to the behavior.

"When the fire alarm is going off, put the hose on the FIRE, not the alarm."

10. Be as active as you can be in your child's life. Educate yourself and be an advocate for your child. Too many parents are uninvolved in their child's wellness.
11. Teach resiliency to children.
12. Be persistent. Provide structure. Stay the course. Be strong.
13. Get support from people who know, can relate, and understand.
14. Be patient! Understand your child's diagnosis.
15. You're doing it! You started the process and you and your child WILL get there!
16. There is help out there for families and children. Look for it. Just ask!
17. Don't make your issues their issues.
18. There are people out there who care and will help!
19. Address the situation as early as possible. The faster you do something about the problem, the better and more help your child can receive.
20. It is ok to GET HELP YOURSELF when you are coping with a child's issues.
21. Try to aim for consistency in the team caring for your child. Too many transitions may be difficult for a struggling child.
22. Normalize behavioral health with your children by saying things such as, "In our family, we have had struggles with depression." Or , "In our family, several people have struggled with anxiety, addiction, etc..."
23. Don't be afraid to address your child's behavioral health needs and concerns.