

MFLC Support: Understanding risk factors for youth mental health after the COVID-19 pandemic

Purpose:

One of the main roles MFLCs have in their service delivery is their ability to continue to support and protect children and youth mental health. In response to the US Surgeon General's 2021 advisory, we provided a training on the advisory and best practices for MFLCs to address and support children and youth mental health. The following information provides an understanding of the additional risk factors for children and youth mental health challenges after the COVID-19 epidemic, using MFLCs SCUBA to address and support children and youth mental health and ways to encourage and support all Military families and their children by using group presentation and topics that support youth mental health.



► Mental Health Risk Factors for Youth



- Pre-existing mental health challenges (before pandemic)
- Parents, guardians or caregivers were frontline workers
- Parent or guardian burnout due to competing demands in family
- Living in an urban area or an area with severe COVID-19 outbreaks
- Expressing fear of personally contracting COVID-19
- Disruptions in routine (transitions to virtual schooling, canceling extracurricular activities, etc.)
- Aces (Adverse Childhood Experiences): child abuse, neglect, violence, or discrimination
- Family socioeconomic challenges
- Trauma, grief and loss; especially of a parent or family member
- Special populations

► Youth with Additional Stressors



Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

- Disruptions in IEP services such as: special education, counseling, occupational, and speech therapies



Racially and Ethnically Diverse Youth

- Black, Latin, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, etc.



Special Youth Populations

- LGBTQ+, low income, rural, immigrant households, juvenile justice, youth with mental health diagnosis

▶ Let's Talk Best Practices

Bring your MFLC **SCUBA** gear to address and support youth mental health:

Share: Mental Health is Part of Overall Health

Communicate: Mental Health Challenges

Understand: Difficult Emotions

Bring Ideas: Discuss Tools and Techniques

Ask for Help: When and from Whom



▶ Best Practices



Share: mental health is overall health

- Sleep hygiene • Nutrition
- Physical activity • Screen time



Communicate: mental health challenges

Mental Health Challenges are Real and Common!

Messages to Communicate:

- Mental health challenges are treatable! • Practice effective coping strategies
- Long-term stress leads to physical and mental health issue if not managed in healthy ways



Understand: difficult emotions

- Help children recognize their feelings, label, and identify emotions
- Support children to express and process their emotions at all stages of development
- Help children understand and develop age-appropriate problem-solving skills



Bring ideas: to manage stress

Support the Development of Emotional Intelligence

Messages to Communicate:

- MFLC Counselors can help children become more skillful in emotional intelligence
- Explain what emotional intelligence is
- Facilitate groups to reduce isolation, discuss feelings, and build connection



Ask for help: when and from whom

- **Start a discussion** – who can kids trust to talk to about problems, concerns, and/or feelings
- **Review trusted adults** outside the family:
 - Education staff, coaches, doctors, counselors, religious leaders, first responders, and community organization leaders
- **Model** what a discussion around feelings may look like with a child
- **Practice** how to effectively communicate a feeling, thought or concern with others



Encourage parents/ guardians to take care of their own mental health



Teach parents and children mindfulness



Encourage parenting styles that reduce stress



Educate parents on stages of child development



Encourage families to build resiliency skills



▶ Summary: Topics for MFLC Consideration



Groups and presentations on:

- Building strong relationships
- Practicing techniques to manage emotions
- Taking care of body and mind
- Being attentive to use of social media and technology
- Supporting the family system
- Family resilience

