K12 ACADEMICS — REFERENCE SERIES

Student Wellbeing & Mental Health

A caring guide for families — how to spot the signs, start the conversation, build resilience, and find help when a child is struggling.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — and the support their children need to thrive.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Young people's mental health has never needed more attention. This guide walks through **ten caring steps** — from noticing the signs to finding help — to help any family support a child's wellbeing with confidence and compassion.

IF YOU NEED HELP RIGHT NOW

Call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), or text **HOME to 741741** (Crisis Text Line) — free, confidential, and available 24/7. In immediate danger, call **911**.

General guidance, not medical advice. This handbook is educational and does not replace care from a qualified professional. If you have concerns about a child, please consult a pediatrician, counselor, or mental-health provider.

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STEP 01 OF 10

Understanding Student Mental Health

WHAT TO KNOW

Mental health is part of **overall health** — how children think, feel, handle stress, and relate to others. Every child has mental health to nurture; it's not the same as mental illness, and it's never a weakness.

BY THE NUMBERS

1 in 5	~50%	It's health
youth face a mental health condition	of conditions begin by age 14	not a phase or a flaw

HOW TO HELP

Treat mental health like physical health — talk about it openly, normalize ups and downs, and model healthy coping in your own life.

GOOD TO KNOW

Most childhood mental-health challenges are **common and treatable** — early support makes an enormous difference.

2

STEP 02 OF 10

Know the Warning Signs

WHAT TO KNOW

Watch for **changes that last** — shifts in mood, behavior, sleep, appetite, or a pulling-away from things they once loved — especially when they persist beyond two weeks and get in the way of daily life.

BY THE NUMBERS

2+ weeks	A shift	Trust your gut
persistent change matters most	from *their* normal	you know your child

HOW TO HELP

Look for **patterns, not single bad days**. Jot down what you notice, and open a gentle, judgment-free conversation about it.

GOOD TO KNOW

It isn't always sadness — withdrawal, irritability, and slipping grades can all be signs something's off.

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STEP 03 OF 10

Start the Conversation

WHAT TO KNOW

Children open up when they feel **safe, not interrogated**. Small, regular, side-by-side moments — a car ride, a walk, doing dishes together — work far better than one big sit-down talk.

BY THE NUMBERS

Listen first	Validate	Little & often
resist the urge to fix	feelings before solutions	beats one big talk

HOW TO HELP

Ask open questions ("How have you been feeling lately?"), listen without judgment, and **validate before you advise**.

GOOD TO KNOW

"That sounds really hard" opens more doors than "you'll be fine."

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STEP 04 OF 10

Build Everyday Resilience

WHAT TO KNOW

The daily basics protect mental health more than anything else: **sleep, movement, nutrition, connection, and routine**. Resilience is built through small habits, not born.

BY THE NUMBERS

8–10 hrs	Connection	Routine
sleep for school-age kids	the #1 protective factor	predictability calms

HOW TO HELP

Protect sleep and screen-off time, build in daily movement and real family connection, and keep **predictable routines** where you can.

GOOD TO KNOW

A consistent **bedtime** does more for a child's mood than almost any other single habit.

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STEP 05 OF 10

Find Support at School

WHAT TO KNOW

Schools are front-line partners. **Counselors, school psychologists, and social workers** offer support at no cost — and a mental-health condition can qualify for a **504 Plan or IEP**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Counselors	504 Plan	IEP
free, on-site support	accommodations for MH	if learning is affected

HOW TO HELP

Connect with the school counselor early, and if a condition affects learning or attendance, ask about a **504 Plan or an evaluation**.

GOOD TO KNOW

Anxiety and depression can qualify for school accommodations — you don't have to wait for a crisis to ask.

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STEP 06 OF 10

Understand Common Challenges

WHAT TO KNOW

Anxiety, depression, ADHD, and stress are the most common challenges young people face — each is real, common, and treatable. This isn't about labels; it's about getting the right support.

BY THE NUMBERS

Anxiety	Treatable	Not a label
most common in youth	therapy & support work	a starting point

HOW TO HELP

Focus on **how your child is functioning** — at school, with friends, at home — rather than trying to diagnose. A professional can clarify what—s going on.

GOOD TO KNOW

Naming a struggle isn't limiting — it's the first step toward the right kind of help.

7

STEP 07 OF 10

Navigate Screens & Social Media

WHAT TO KNOW

Screens aren't all bad — but heavy use, especially social media, links to more anxiety, poorer sleep, and constant comparison. **Balance and boundaries** are what matter.

BY THE NUMBERS

Quality > quantity	Screen-free sleep	Model it
what & when it's used	devices out of bedrooms	kids copy adults

HOW TO HELP

Set **tech-free times and zones** (meals, bedrooms, the hour before bed), and stay curious about what they see and feel online.

GOOD TO KNOW

Getting devices **out of the bedroom overnight** is one of the highest-impact changes a family can make.

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STEP 08 OF 10

Know When to Seek Help

WHAT TO KNOW

Reach out when struggles **last, worsen, or interfere** with school, friendships, or family. You don't need to wait for a crisis, and asking for help is a sign of strength — not failure.

BY THE NUMBERS

Start with	Therapy	Sooner
pediatrician or counselor	counseling helps most kids	early help works best

HOW TO HELP

Start with your **pediatrician or school counselor** for a referral; ask about therapy options and what your insurance covers.

GOOD TO KNOW

You don't need a diagnosis to begin — a pediatrician or counselor is a perfectly good first call.

9 STEP 09 OF 10

Support a Child in Crisis

WHAT TO KNOW

If a child talks about wanting to die, hurting themselves, or feeling hopeless and trapped, **take it seriously and stay calm**. You are not alone, and free, confidential help is available 24/7.

REACH OUT

Call or text 988
Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Text HOME
to 741741

Always
take it seriously

HOW TO RESPOND

Stay calm and listen without panic, keep anything dangerous out of reach, don't leave them alone, and reach out to **988** or a professional right away.

GOOD TO KNOW

Asking directly about suicidal thoughts does **not** plant the idea — it opens the door to help and relief.

10 STEP 10 OF 10

Care for the Caregiver

WHAT TO KNOW

You can't pour from an empty cup. A child's single biggest protection is a **steady, supported adult** — which means your own mental health matters, too.

BY THE NUMBERS

Your wellbeing	Ask for help	Not alone
matters too	and model it	support exists

HOW TO HELP

Protect your own rest and lean on your support network. Remember that **modeling healthy coping** teaches more than any lecture ever will.

GOOD TO KNOW

Caring for yourself isn't selfish — it's how you stay strong enough to be there for them.

KEEP THESE CLOSE

Help & Crisis Resources

Free, confidential help is always available — for a child, or for you. Save these somewhere everyone can find them.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text **988** — free, confidential, 24/7, for anyone in emotional distress or crisis.

Crisis Text Line

Text **HOME to 741741** to reach a trained crisis counselor, any time.

The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ youth)

Call **1-866-488-7386** or text **START to 678-678** — 24/7 support for LGBTQ young people.

NAMI HelpLine

1-800-950-6264 — the National Alliance on Mental Illness, for information & support (not a crisis line).

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-4357 — free, confidential treatment referrals and information, 24/7.

Start close to home

Your child's **pediatrician** and **school counselor** are trusted first steps for guidance and referrals.

In an emergency — if someone is in immediate danger — call **911**, or go to your nearest emergency room.

EVERY CHILD DESERVES TO THRIVE

Find Your Community.

No family should navigate this alone. Explore school-counseling, special-education, and family-support resources — among **1,297 free guides** at our resource library.

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