

CATHEDRAL
HOME
EST. 1910

Building Mental Health

a Back-to-School Guide
for Parents & Caregivers



what research tells us

Children thrive when they have:

- At least **one caring, trusted adult** they can turn to.
- **Predictable routines** that help them feel safe.
- **Opportunities to build confidence** by overcoming challenges.
- A **sense of belonging** at home, at school, and in their community.
- **Permission to talk openly** about emotions and ask for help when they need it.

These everyday experiences don't eliminate stress, but they make children better equipped to navigate it.

Every August, we focus on backpacks, schedules, and school supplies.

Those things matter.

But the most important thing a child carries into a new school year can't be packed in a backpack.

It's the confidence that someone is there for them.

It's knowing where they belong.

It's believing they can handle what's ahead.

Those are the things that build mental health

Starting a new school year brings excitement, opportunity, uncertainty, and stress. New teachers, changing friendships, higher expectations, and unfamiliar routines are all part of growing up. Feeling nervous doesn't mean something is wrong. In fact, learning to navigate manageable challenges is one of the ways children develop resilience.

What makes the difference is whether they have supportive relationships and caring adults to help them through those moments.

As a parent or caregiver, you don't have to have all the answers. You don't have to prevent every struggle. One of the greatest gifts you can offer is your steady presence.

This guide is built around a simple belief:

Mental health isn't something we have. It's something we build.

And every conversation, routine, and moment of connection is an opportunity to help your child build it.

five

simple ways families can strengthen mental health every day

1 Belonging

Children need to know:
"I matter. I am accepted. I have a place here."

Belonging is one of the strongest protective factors for mental health. It grows when children feel seen, valued, and included—at home, at school, and in their community.

Try this:

- Create one family ritual your child can count on each week.
- Learn the names of your child's friends, teachers, or coaches.
- Help your child find one activity where they feel they belong.

2 Relationships

Children need someone to turn to.

One caring adult can make an enormous difference in a young person's life. Your child doesn't need a perfect parent—they need adults who listen, stay curious, and keep showing up.

Try this:

- Spend ten uninterrupted minutes together each day.
- Put your phone away during one conversation.
- Ask more questions than you give advice.

3 Routines

Predictability helps children feel safe.

Back-to-school routines reduce stress because they help children know what to expect.

Try this:

- Set a consistent bedtime.
- Eat one meal together whenever possible.
- Create a simple after-school routine.

4 Confidence

Confidence grows through experience

Children build confidence when they solve problems, recover from mistakes, and discover they can do hard things.

Try this:

- Let your child solve age-appropriate problems before stepping in.
- Celebrate effort, persistence, and growth.
- Remind them of challenges they've already overcome.

5 Joy

Fun isn't extra. It's part of healthy development.

Play, laughter, creativity, movement, and time outdoors all help children manage stress and strengthen well-being.

Try this:

- Take a walk together.
- Play a game after dinner.
- Make time for hobbies that have nothing to do with achievement.



Mental health isn't built through one big conversation or one perfect decision. It's built over time through everyday experiences that help children feel safe, connected, and capable.

No family does these perfectly. The goal isn't perfection—it's creating more moments that help children grow.

start the conversation

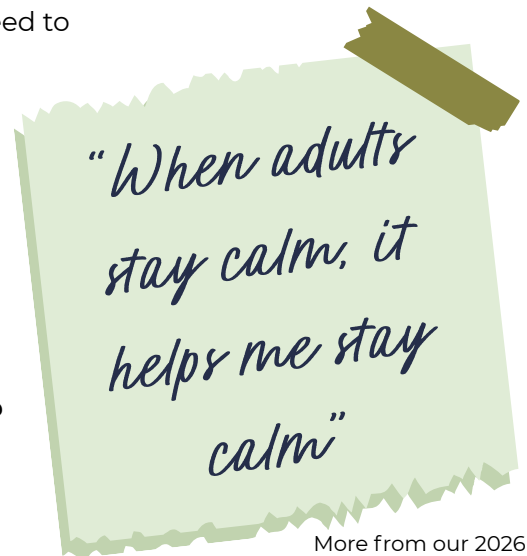


Sometimes the best question isn't, "How was school?"
Most children answer "fine" because it's the easiest response.

Instead of asking questions that can be answered with one word, try questions that invite stories, feelings, and reflection. You don't need to ask all of them. Choose one, listen with curiosity, and let the conversation go where it goes.

Try instead:

- What made you smile today?
- When did you feel most like yourself?
- Was there a moment you felt left out?
- What's something you're worried about?
- Who made your day easier?
- What felt hard today?
- What are you looking forward to tomorrow?
- What's something you're proud of?
- Who could you ask for help if you needed it?
- How can I be there for you this week?



More from our 2026
Youth Voices Survey is
available here



if they're having a difficult day

instead of saying

- ✗ you'll be fine
- ✗ don't worry about it
- ✗ just ignore them

try instead

- ✓ Tell me more
- ✓ That sounds really hard
- ✓ I'm so glad you told me
- ✓ What do you need from me right now?

The start of a new school year brings change, and with change comes stress. Feeling nervous before the first day of school, struggling with a new routine, or having an occasional bad day are all part of growing up.

What matters isn't whether your child ever struggles. What matters is whether those struggles begin to interfere with their ability to enjoy life, connect with others, or do the things they normally love.

Most challenges improve with time, support, and caring relationships. When they don't, it may be time to reach out for additional help.

if your child tells you they're struggling

Try to:

- Stay calm, even if you're worried.
- Thank them for telling you.
- Listen without rushing to solve the problem.
- Let them know they aren't alone.
- Make a plan together for what comes next.



when is it more than just a bad day?

normal growing pains

It's common for children and teens to:

- Feel nervous about a new teacher or school.
- Be tired during the first few weeks of a new routine.
- Worry about fitting in or making friends.
- Have occasional mood swings or frustration.
- Feel disappointed after setbacks or conflicts.

These experiences are part of learning and growing, especially when children have caring adults to help them navigate them.

it may be time to check in more closely

Consider reaching out to a trusted professional if you notice changes that:

- Last for several weeks instead of improving.
- Make it difficult for your child to participate in school, activities, or relationships.
- Represent a significant change from your child's usual behavior.

Examples might include:

- Withdrawing from friends or family.
- Losing interest in activities they usually enjoy.
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches without a clear medical cause.
- Major changes in sleep or appetite.
- Persistent sadness, hopelessness, or irritability.
- Increased anxiety that interferes with everyday life.
- Talking about feeling like a burden, wanting to disappear, or not wanting to be here.

You know your child better than anyone.

If something feels different, it's okay to ask questions, check in with their teacher, or reach out to a mental health professional. You don't need to wait for a crisis to ask for help.

Asking for support early can make challenges easier to address before they become bigger ones.

helping your child through hard moments

You don't have to have the perfect words. You just have to keep showing up.

When your child is struggling, it's natural to want to fix the problem right away. But one of the most powerful things you can offer isn't the perfect solution. It's the confidence that they don't have to face hard things alone.

Children often remember how we responded long after they forget exactly what we said.

listen

When children feel heard, they're more likely to keep talking.

Try:

- Giving your full attention.
- Letting them finish before responding.
- Reflecting back what you hear.

stay curious

You don't have to solve everything immediately.

Questions like these invite conversation:

- Can you tell me more?
- What do you think made today so hard?
- Has this been happening for a while?
- What do you think would help right now?

stay connected

Children often experience emotions before they have words for them.

You can help by wondering with them:

- It sounds like you felt left out.
- Were you disappointed?
- I wonder if that felt overwhelming.

reach out

Once your child feels heard, ask: "What do you think we should do next?"

Sometimes the next step is small:

- Sending a message to a friend.
- Talking with a teacher.
- Taking a break.
- Practicing what to say.
- Asking another trusted adult for support.



every child

needs someone to turn to

And every parent deserves support, too.
No family gets through childhood
without difficult moments.



keep building mental health

Mental health isn't built in one conversation.

Or one school year.

It's built in everyday moments:

- Listening without judgment.
- Showing up consistently.
- Laughing together.
- Encouraging independence.
- Repairing after conflict.
- Reminding your child that they are loved, they belong, and they never have to face life's challenges alone.

Your child doesn't need a perfect parent.

They need someone who keeps showing up.

Someone who listens.

Someone who believes in them, even on the days they struggle to believe in themselves.

Every conversation, every shared meal, every ride home from school, every moment of connection helps build the relationships that protect mental health.

Keep showing up.

It matters.

**when you need
extra support, we
can help with:**

counseling

Professional counseling for children, teens, and families, available statewide through telehealth and in person in Laramie.

Wyo Text

Free, confidential text-based emotional support for anyone in Wyoming who needs someone to talk to. Text WYO to 741741

family resources

Care coordination, parenting support, and connections to community resources for families in Albany County.

youth crisis care

Immediate support when a young person is experiencing a crisis

You are not alone. Neither is your child.

Learn more about Cathedral Home's services, explore additional family resources, and watch Wyoming youth share what they wish adults knew by visiting cathedralhome.org

cathedralhome.org | (307) 745-8997



keep learning, keep growing

Want to go further? Caring for your
mental health never ends.

Keep learning,
keep growing,
keep practicing.



tips & guides

Explore relatable guides, filled with ideas, tips, and ways to support your child's and family's mental wellness every day.

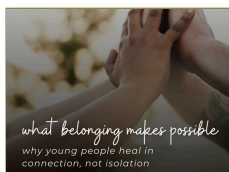
[/tips](#)



trainings for coaches & mentors

Participate in training to recognize risk factors and warning signs of suicide, and practice initiating conversations and asking questions.

[/coaches](#)



ideas & education

The Cathedral Corner blog highlights issues that matter to communities—youth mental health, prevention, and advocacy.

[/CathedralCorner](#)



self-care & advocacy

Help make simple, accessible, confidential resources visible to our youth. Download posters, or request materials for your community.

[/741](#)

all this and more are available at cathedralhome.org



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