Keeping Kids Mentally And Emotionally Healthy

(StatePoint) You probably already understand the importance of safeguarding your children against physical ailments. But did you know that keeping kids mentally and emotionally healthy is just as crucial to their overall wellness?

In fact, mental health challenges can impair a young person’s capacity to reach age-appropriate developmental goals, say experts.

“With so much going on in the world today and the fast pace of modern life, it’s important for parents, kids and pediatricians to talk about social and emotional issues,” says Dr. Robert W. Block, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day, observed May 9, serves as an excellent reminder to consider your child or teen’s emotional well-being. Throughout the month of May, which is Mental Health Month, pediatricians nationwide are encouraging parents to talk with their children about their worries, stress and problems, and to foster great mental health at home.

To get started, the AAP is offering these tips for parents:

• Talk with your pediatrician. If your child’s mood, behavior or social interactions are concerning you, your pediatrician can help you talk through problems, and find tools and resources to help. Let your children know that they should feel comfortable talking with their doctor, as well, as he or she is a great person to confide in about worries or stress.

• Talk with your child or teen. Find out what good things are happening for your child as well as any difficulties. You can’t know something is wrong if you don’t ask. Families should communicate daily. Whether it’s over dinner, or while walking your child to school, or after sports practice, spend time each day checking in with your child.

• Get your child involved in the community. Children need to realize that the world is a better place because they are in it. Understanding the importance of personal contributions can serve as a source of purpose and motivation. Encourage them to volunteer, join clubs and make friends.

• Practice healthy habits. A great night’s sleep, proper nutrition and regular exercise can all contribute to emotional health and well-being -- so encourage healthy habits. You can set a great example by practicing what you preach!

• Help manage stress. Although stress is a part of life and growing up, you need to intervene when you sense that it is undermining your child’s physical or psychological well-being.

If your child has persistent headaches or stomach pains, seems restless, tired, depressed or uncommunicative, stress may be to blame. But you can help children react appropriately to their stressors. Brainstorm possible solutions to help your child or teen feel empowered to improve his or her own life.

More information on mental health and children can be found at www.healthychildren.org.

Great parenting means promoting a happy, healthy home. Your child’s health depends on it.