

LIVE *Authentic*

An Ellie Mental Health Magazine



**7 TIPS FOR BUILDING
HEALTHY SIBLING
RELATIONSHIPS**

A PARENT'S GUIDE
Anxiety and Depression in
Children

**HELPING KIDS COPE
WITH LOSS AND
GRIEF**



A Note from our Editor

We hear it all the time: kids are struggling with their mental health—and the numbers back it up. Rates of anxiety, depression, ADHD, and suicidal ideation in kids and teens continue to climb. Research shows that 1 in 6 youth will experience a mental health disorder, and that half of all lifetime mental health conditions start showing up before age 14.

Because of that, we wanted to devote this entire issue to kids and mental health.

You'll find insights and ideas from some incredible Ellie therapists, and we hope this issue serves as a helpful resource-- whether you're a parent, teacher, coach, mentor, or just someone who really cares about the kids in your life.

We hope it reminds you of the important role you play, and that you find as much value in these pages as we did putting them together.

Miranda Barker, LICSW
Therapist and Director of Brand Content

Download our free fortune teller printable here:



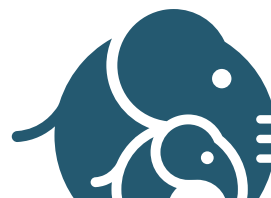
Fun fact: This coping skills list was written in a font that was developed by Kira Olson to make it easier for people with dyslexia to read!

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Coping Skills from A to Z

Aromatherapy

Box Breaths
(see below)

Coloring or
Creating

Dancing

Exercising

Five Senses
Grounding Skill
(see below)

Gratitude

Hugs

Instruments

Journaling

Kindness

Laughing

Making Art

Nature Walks

Origami

Playing with
an Animal

Question
Thoughts
(is this worry realistic?)

Reading

Spending Time
Together

Try Something
New

Unwinding

Visualization

Write it Down

exhale

Yoga

Zzzzz

(Make sure you're getting plenty of sleep!)

Box Breaths

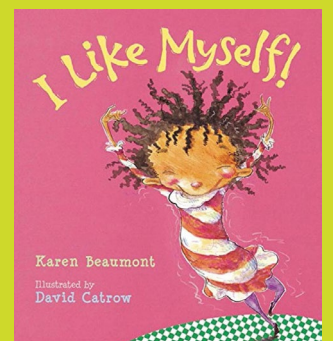
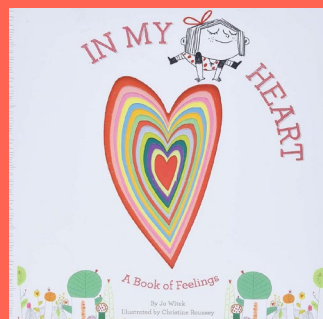
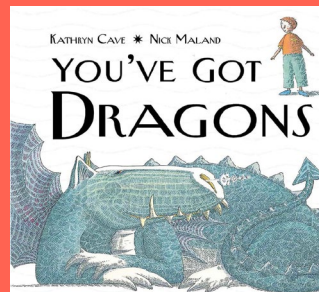
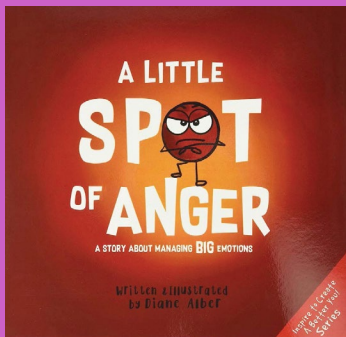
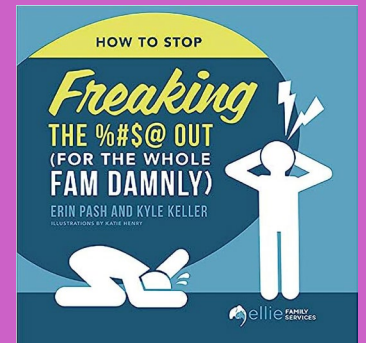
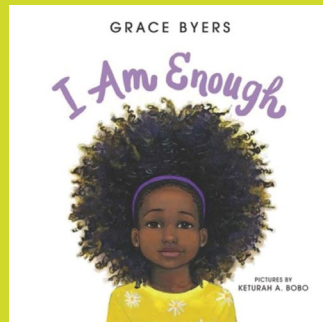
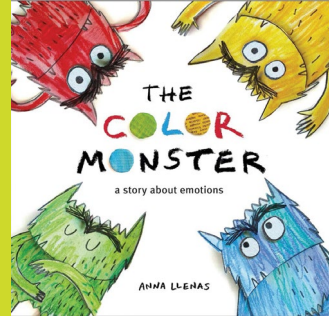
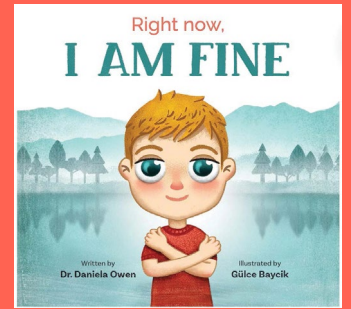


Five Senses Grounding Skill:

1. Notice five things you can see around you
2. Notice four things you can touch
3. Notice three things you can hear
4. Notice two things you can smell (or your favorite smells)
5. Notice one thing you can taste (or your favorite tastes)

Ellie *Picks*

Therapist-recommended books for kids





7 TIPS FOR BUILDING HEALTHY SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

By Letisha Harris, MA

Start talking about and promoting positive ideas around siblings even before the addition of a sibling.

- These can be fostered through conversations with current siblings around what it will mean to have another sibling.
- We suggest reading books together about how to communicate with or about their siblings. Here are some of our favorites:

1. *Just Like My Brother* by Gianna Marino
2. *The Berenstain Bears New Baby* written by Stan and Jan Berenstain
3. *Little Miss, Big Sis* written by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Peter H. Reynolds
4. *What Big Brothers Do Best*, written by Laura Numeroff
5. *The Sister Book* written by Todd Parr
6. *The New Baby* written by Mercer Mayer
7. *Big Red Lollipop* by Rukhsana Khan
8. *Maple and Willow Together* by Lori Nichols
9. *Peter's Chair* by Ezra Jack Keats
10. *The Bad Birthday Idea* by Madeline Valentine

Encourage Shared Interests

- Find common hobbies or activities that your children can enjoy together. This promotes bonding and provides opportunities for shared experiences and mutual fun.

Connect with the children individually.

- Making sure the children feel connected to their caregivers and secure in the relationship helps each child to feel confident, loved, and decrease competition with their siblings.
- We recommend parents or caregivers have a rotating night (weekly or monthly) for 1:1 time with each child to ensure they are getting time with parents. This helps prevent jealousy.

Encourage Teamwork and Cooperation

- Engage your children in activities that require collaboration and teamwork, such as playing board games or participating in group sports or projects. This is a really common tool used by family therapists, and it helps the siblings develop a sense of camaraderie and cooperation.

Notice and Celebrate Individuality

- Even if they have some shared interests, your kids are going to be good at or enjoy different things! Acknowledge and celebrate each sibling's unique qualities, talents, and achievements, but remember to avoid comparisons that can lead to rivalry or jealousy.

Teach Conflict Resolution Skills

- Kids learn all sorts of important social skills including conflict resolution, perspective taking, and cooperation through playing with their peers and siblings. This lays the groundwork for these skills later in life, and we can help our children learn how to express their feelings, needs, and opinions in a constructive manner. Encourage them to find compromises and negotiate solutions when by asking things like, "How do you think it made her feel when that happened?" or "How do you think we can compromise so everyone is happy?"

Encourage Active Listening to One Another

- When kids are expressing their feelings, ensure the other is listening! Encourage them to take turns and point out if you're noticing frequent interruptions. Practice helping them to see things from each other's perspectives.



HELPING KIDS COPE WITH LOSS AND GRIEF

**By Erica Goloski, LPCC, ART-P
and Gina Young, MSW, LICSW**

At some point in everyone's lives, we experience grief and loss. When children are dealing with loss, their emotions can be particularly complex and hard to navigate. Whether it's the death of a loved one, a divorce, or a significant life change, helping children cope with grief requires a compassionate and thoughtful approach. As caregivers, mentors, therapists, and educators, we play a pivotal role in providing the support, understanding, and tools necessary for children to navigate their grief journey and emerge with resilience.

An estimated 1 in 14 children in the U.S. will experience the death of a parent or sibling before age 18, combining over 4 million children on a national level (The New York Life Foundation, 2017). This statistic from six years ago was prior to the global pandemic COVID-19, wherein according to the Imperial College London, 258,800 children in the U.S. have lost a primary or secondary caregiver.

Children facing grief and loss will always have unique outcomes, even children within the family system, impacted by the same loss, but it's important to note that children impacted by grief have higher rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD compared to nonbereaved peers.

What are the signs/symptoms of childhood grief:

- School avoidance/academic struggles
- Emotional reactions that seem "unlike" the child (this could be anger, chronic fatigue, anxiety-attacks, suicidal ideation)
- Feelings of shock, confusion, denial, sadness
- Rough and boisterous play or repetitive play
- Behavioral and emotional regressions, like acting much younger for an extended period or reverting to earlier behaviors (For example: Being hyper-clingy, using baby talk, thumb-sucking, and wetting the bed.)
- Excessively imitating or asking questions about the deceased; repeated statements of wanting to join the deceased; inventing games about dying or asking many questions about the death in specifics
- Complaints of ailments like headaches and stomachaches
- Avoidance of friends and withdrawal from personal interests

What can help children cope with grief and loss:

- Children can be concrete in their thinking. To lessen confusion, avoid expressions such as “passed away” or “went to sleep.” Answer their questions about death simply and honestly. Only offer details that they can absorb. Providing too much information can be overwhelming.
- Allow children to talk about fears around death. Give them the opportunity to discuss their fears and validate their experience.
- Children can be repetitive in their grief which can make adults concerned, however, their processing speed is slower. Normalize that it can take time to process.
- Children can be physical in their grief. Offering reassurance about what is happening can validate their experience.
- Children need safe adults and caregivers to talk about grief and loss, especially when cyclical anniversaries occur. Encourage them to create a tradition that helps honor their emotions.
- Whenever possible, allow or offer choices in what they do or don't do to memorialize the deceased and ways to express their feelings about the death.
- Children thrive with routine, and at times the “changed behavior” within a family system might be the most difficult aspect of their grief. Supporting them in their environment with a schedule supports regulation.

Activities for Children and Teens for grief and loss:

- Find a therapist for individual therapy and family therapy
- Create a memory box (include photos, embellishments, cards, etc.)
- Write a letter to their loved one
- Provide them with a journal and art supplies to process these losses
- Read books on grief (seen our recommendations below)
- Make a music playlist about their loved one
- Grief summer camps, like [Camp Erin](#)

Books Our Therapists Recommend on This Topic:

- *The Grief Rock: A Book to Understand Grief and Love* by Natasha Daniels (Ages 3–7)
- *I Miss You: A First Look at Death* by Pat Thomas and Lesley Harker (Ages 3–7)
- *When Someone Dies: A Children's Mindful How-To Guide on Grief and Loss* by Andrea Down, MSW (Ages 4–10)
- *Lacie's Moon: A Children's Story About Grief* (Ages 6–18)
- *The Invisible String* (Ages 3–7) by Patrice Karst
- *The Invisible Leash: A Story Celebrating Love After the Loss of a Pet* (Ages 5–10, Pet specific)
- *Old Coyote* by Nancy Wood (Ages 5–8, Lifecycle specific)
- *How I Feel: Grief Journal for Kids: Guided Prompts to Explore Your Feelings and Find Peace* by Mia Roldan LCSW LCDC (Ages 8–13)
- *Tear Soup* by Pat Schwiebert (Ages 13+)
- *A Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teens and Friends* by Helen Fitzgerald (Ages 13+)
- *Chill & Spill* by Art With Heart (Ages 13+)
- *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas* by Alan D Wolfelt (Ages 13+)

Calming First-Day Fears: A Parent's Guide to Back-to-School Anxiety

By Miranda Barker, LICSW

The stores are full of school supplies and the weather may be starting to cool down. If you're a parent, you might be feeling some excitement or dread-- The season of transition is upon us! It can feel like a lot to navigate, but this blog will provide you with some tips and tricks on how to help navigate the back-to-school transition.

Everyone struggles with the newness of going back to school to some degree. It's completely normal for your kids to feel some anxiety with the thought of going back to school and settling into a new routine. This doesn't necessarily mean that they qualify for an anxiety diagnosis, but it could mean that some extra tips and coping skills can help to lower their fears and make a seamless adjustment.

Practical Tips for Easing Back-to-School Anxiety

Here are some simple grounding or coping exercises that you could teach your child so that they might use throughout the school day or when they're feeling more anxious:

- Box breathing exercise
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- 5-4-3-2-1 technique
- Coloring or drawing
- Having a quiet fidget available, like a kinetic sand, drawing supplies, stress balls, sensory sticker or a squishy sensory toy
- Having gum, a mint, or sour candy available if allowed (coincides with using the senses in the 5-4-3-2-1)
- Taking stretch breaks
- Encouraging your kids to create a worry plan: have them write down a list of five things that help when they're feeling anxious.
- Splashing cold water on their face or having cold, ice water available in their water bottle

This list is not extensive but could be a great start with finding out what

works for your child when it comes to navigating nerves with school. When possible I also recommend that parents and kids have visits to the school to help ease the transition. This is especially helpful when they are changing schools or transitioning from middle to high school.

Finally, don't underestimate the power of routines and daily schedules. Routines help reduce anxiety by providing some stability and normalcy. When kids know what's coming or what's happening next, they feel more in control. Coming up with a solid bedtime routine to help ease anxiety and contribute to a good night's sleep is especially helpful. If your mornings feel rushed and your child seems to be more anxious in the mornings, help them come up with a routine to follow and be sure to incorporate some coping skills.

I often recommend that families start implementing the routines at least a week before school starts. I know that in that last week of summer, you want to get that last big trip in or let the kids sleeping, but if you have an anxious child, starting that routine earlier is going to be a big help.

Kids Book List for Managing Anxiety

I love to use books to help educate kids and teach them about recognizing anxiety, normalizing feelings and teaching calming skills. Here are some books about anxiety I recommend for any teacher or parent (Links in the titles go to amazon, and some are affiliate links, but you can find them at any bookstore):

- ***How to Get Your Octopus to School*** by Becky Scharnhorst
- ***Breathe Like a Bear: First Day of School Worries*** by Kira Willey
- ***The Invisible String*** by Patrice Karst
- ***The Kissing Hand*** by Audrey Penn
- ***Me and My Fear*** by Francesca Sanna

- ***I'm Worried*** by Michael Ian Black
- ***Wilma Jean and the Worry Machine*** by Julia Cook
- ***A Worry Says What?*** By Allison Edwards
- ***Breathe Like a Bear*** by Kira Willey
- ***B is for Breathe*** by Melissa Boyd
- ***Right Now, I am Fine*** by Dr. Daniela Owen
- ***A Little Calm Spot*** by Diane Alber

Long-Term Strategies for Building Confidence and Resilience

To help build resilience and decrease anxiety in children of all ages, it can help to have open conversations with them. Create a safe place for them to communicate their fears or anxieties about beginning school again. Using active listening and validation can help them feel a little more at ease. Download our free kids conversation cards here:



When to Seek Professional Help

Watch for some of the symptoms or warning signs above—if you feel like your child is feeling overly anxious or really struggling with this transition, therapy can offer support and skills. There are lots of options for support: Ellie Mental Health offers therapy for kids in numerous states, and many therapists offer appointment hours that are flexible with school schedules and after-school extracurriculars. It is also becoming increasingly common for schools to have a therapist providing treatment for kids in the school to make appointments even easier.



A PARENTS' GUIDE

Anxiety and Depression in Children

Mental health disorders were on the rise in all populations before COVID slithered through the door, but young people have been particularly affected. A recent study from the CDC reports one in six children (17.4%) 2-8 years old have a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder. Nearly ten percent of our teenagers have anxiety, and depression rates don't trail too far behind.

You may have asked yourself, "Is my teenager just going through normal hormonal changes?" "Is my kiddo's fear of groups normal?" We hope to help you to be able to discern between the general rollercoaster that is childhood and a serious mental condition.

Anxiety and sadness are natural human emotions that we all experience at times, especially when there are stressful events in our lives. But it is important to recognize in a child when their symptoms go beyond typical worries or sadness. This is critical, as suicide is a leading cause of death for children, adolescents, and young adults in the United States.

Symptoms of depression to watch for include:

- Low mood, sadness, or potentially irritable mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities they once enjoyed
- Sleep difficulties such as trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- Difficulties with restlessness, or the opposite, becoming slower in one's movements
- Low energy
- Changes in appetite (which may lead to weight loss or weight gain)

- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or intense feelings of guilt
- Concentration difficulties
- Increased suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts

If you are noticing these symptoms or an increase in anxiety, therapy and counseling are great tools that can help. Remember that if you or a loved one is experiencing thoughts of suicide, please call or text 988 for help in crisis.

How do I know if my child needs medication?

At the end of the day, there isn't a one-size-fits-all answer to this question. However, there are guidelines that help us recommend a treatment approach. Our goal for anxiety and depression treatment is to reduce as many symptoms as possible. We often recommend that children and adolescents with mild symptoms of anxiety or depression start treatment with psychotherapy as it helps to build their tools for managing these symptoms. In cases of moderate to severe anxiety or depression, we recommend a more intensive approach to psychotherapy and/or medication management. Some individuals prefer to start with either psychotherapy or medication management alone, but some will likely require both therapy and medication working together if symptoms become severe.

[Read the full article on our blog.](#)

How To Launch Your Teen Into Adulthood

By Terri Bly, PsyD

My impression, both as a clinician and parent, is that the past few decades have seen a gradual cultural shift towards prioritizing our children's happiness over their resilience and independence. While I am certainly not opposed to children being happy, prioritizing their happiness can cause us to lose sight of the fact that the overarching goal of parenting is to ensure our children have the skills they need to function independently from us – or what we sometimes refer to as “launching.” And since fostering resilience in our children will almost certainly involve decisions that periodically make them unhappy, I think some parents tend to shy away from those resilience-building practices. It's understandable, since no one loves dealing with an unhappy or angry kid, but at the same time, a small human who lacks resilience and independent living skills eventually becomes a big human who cannot function on their own – no matter how happy they were as a child.

Once your child reaches adolescence, it becomes even more critical to ensure they are actively developing the skills they will need to live independently. After all, the launch date is on the horizon, and your window of opportunity to influence your offspring's development is closing quickly. Unfortunately, it's also the point in time when parenting your child towards independence can feel particularly unrewarding. It involves a lot of saying no, setting boundaries, following through on accountability measures and – with some teens, anyway – dealing with a whole truckload of blowback. Ugh.

The good news is that it is never too late to help your teenager prepare for adulthood. If you've prioritized happiness over resilience up to this point, it might be a lot

harder to implement changes now, and you are sure to get some pushback. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. Your teen may not thank you for it right away, but they will absolutely benefit from whatever effort you are willing and able to put into preparing them now to survive out in the world later.

Helping Children Learn Resilience

My favorite metaphor when talking with parents or caregivers about how they can foster independence and resilience in their kids comes from the book, *Parenting in the Eye of the Storm*, by Katie Naftzger. Although the book is written for adoptive parents of teenagers, this metaphor is 100% applicable to all parents. It goes something like this:

When visiting the Galapagos Islands to witness the hatching of the baby sea turtles, visitors are emphatically instructed not to pick up the baby turtles. It doesn't matter if the hatchling fell into a hole, or flipped onto their back, or got stuck behind a log. You do. not. pick. them. up. Even if you believe they won't make it to the ocean without your intervention, you still do not pick them up. Why? Because the only way they will survive the ocean is by developing the skills and strength that come from overcoming all of the obstacles they encounter on their way to the shore. By picking up the turtles and carrying them past the obstacles, you are actually increasing the likelihood they won't survive once they reach the water. You are, in effect, disabling them.

Of course, this isn't a perfect analogy, since human parents are expected to be much more hands-on with their offspring than is the case with sea turtles. But what



this metaphor captures so beautifully is that when we focus on making our children's lives happy, comfortable and easy, we are preventing them from developing the skills and strength they need to survive the big, complex and sometimes dangerous ocean that is the real world. We are carrying them across the entire beach, yet somehow expecting them to have the confidence and competence they need to navigate the ocean.

Simple Ideas for Promoting Independence

Rather than carry our baby turtles to the sea or remove all obstacles they might encounter along the way, what we want to do is coach our baby turtles as they make their way to the sea. These obstacles can include anything from household chores to mental health or developmental disorders. So the next time you are debating whether, or how much, to help your teenager, ask yourself this question: How can I coach my baby turtle around this obstacle, without picking them up and carrying them to the other side? Here are some examples:

- Instead of waking your teenager up in the mornings, teach them how to set their alarm and get out of bed in time to get where they need to go.
- Rather than doing their laundry, teach them how to do it on their own.
- If they are struggling with a class at school, avoid reaching out to the teacher yourself, and instead encourage your teen to reach out to the teacher.
- If they are anxious about driving, rather than letting them put it off "until they're ready," help them access the resources they need to address their anxiety and get behind the wheel.
- If your teenager has ADHD, instead of keeping track

of all of their activities for them, teach them how to make use of apps or other tools to help them stay organized.

- If they break their smartphone and want a new one, rather than buy it for them straight away, help them create a plan for earning the money they need for a replacement.

Keep in mind that it doesn't really matter if you "don't mind" doing things for your teen, like washing their clothes or driving them everywhere they need to go. Nor does it matter if you can afford to replace that broken phone. That isn't the point. Baby sea turtles don't weigh very much and I imagine it's quite enjoyable to carry the cute little guys down to the shoreline. The point is that by doing everything for them, and helping them avoid doing the hard stuff, you are reducing their chances of survival. We want our teenagers to feel confident in their ability to thrive as adults, and the best way we can do that is by allowing them to climb out of that hole, flip themselves back over onto their feet, and navigate their way around the logs.



THE WORD "NO" AND WHERE TO GO

By Anna Welle, MSW, LCSW

Maybe it's as you and your family are getting ready to start the day or your neighbors are about to arrive for a shared dinner, and there's still much to do — the word "no" from your child can feel like a frustrating hurdle to clear.

There will be moments we hear no, and we feel we have the time to explore this and offer solutions for change. Then there are the other moments: three lunch boxes in hand, a missing backpack, spilled OJ, and the word "no" comes when your child is asked to put their jacket on.

When there's time (and possibility for prevention):

While thinking of parenting and the word no, I once read that "setting limits is not about compliance." As parents, it's essential to take time and space to understand and create the limits that seem most valuable to your household — maybe it's bath time or a bedtime routine. Communicate the limits with your child and know it's okay to focus on one boundary at a time. It can be overwhelming for both of you to try to fix numerous things simultaneously.

Can you include engagement or choice? Children are often seeking a sense of security that can come from predictability or control. Can your child have two options for the socks they wear or the fruit they have with breakfast?

The word "no" is not always connected to your child not wanting to comply; in many moments, this is most connected to feeling. Find a playful way to loosen the emotion that is stuck within your child.

Reverse roles and have your child direct and show you how to brush your teeth. Do their favorite characters have a clip online that includes that same daily task, such as Elmo brushing his teeth? Could you have a dance party while brushing? This also provides your child more time to connect with you.

When we are on the go or overwhelmed:

If you find yourself overwhelmed with emotions of your own or a task list that seems without end, it can be challenging to soothe a tearful, restless child who is saying the word no. Try to remember this helpful guide from Nicole Schwartz with **Imperfect Families**:

Empathize, Set a Limit, Focus on Connection. Keep it simple and intentional.

- **Empathize:** "I see that you have heavy feelings today. I bet it was a busy Monday."
- **Set a Limit:** "Luckily, you are I are a team. We'll figure out how to brush our teeth after a busy day."
- **Focus on Connection:** "Should we invite Elmo and friends to brush their teeth with us too? I would love to be there as well."

It is okay if the tears continue. This can indicate that your child is moving through the emotion that has them stuck. Tears can be thought of as a release. Sit with them, and ask if they would like to be held or if an item of comfort could be offered. This is a chance to work through the tension and allow for a new beginning.

It is also okay if the morning was too busy and your child made it to school with one sock on or teeth brushed but not their hair. We get to try again.

One of the greatest ways to support your child is by providing empathy and co-regulation. At the end of the day, when life gets busy, the basics can be our best guide.

If the limits, playful exploration, choices, or scripts do not work, know that **tomorrow is a new day**. It's okay that each day looks different; some of this will come with time.

You're doing all that you can. How wonderful is that?

Looking for Support?

Find Your Local Clinic Here:

Ellie Mental Health offers in-person and virtual therapy and medication management services (exact services vary by state). Find your therapist match here!

