



**Lunch and Learn: Is My Kid OK?
Early Signs of Mental Health Struggles
TRANSCRIPT (Modified for readability as standalone piece
from video)**



Video

Watch Time: 22 minutes (presentation)

Read Time: 20 minutes (approximately)

Introductions

Dr. Lisa Novak, CATCH ([00:04](#)):

Welcome everybody and happy Spring. We're excited to have you here to listen to this really important topic, and I'm going to introduce our speaker, Jodi, in just a moment. We'll be talking today about some of the early signs and sometimes significantly less obvious signs of mental health struggles in our kids. Before I introduce Jodi, I just wanted to discuss a few quick housekeeping issues. The way that we typically structure our Lunch and Learns, if you haven't been to one yet, is that we will have Jodi speak for the first half an hour or so, and then we will leave the second half hour for questions at the end. Please, if you have any questions as Jodi's speaking, you can enter them into the chat or you can privately message me and we will try to get to as many of those as we can. We also did receive a few questions ahead of time before today. One other thing I wanted to mention is that Jodi and several of the other therapists at Cutting Edge Counseling, where she works, write blogs several times a month on topics related to parenting and therapy. And so if you'd like to receive that newsletter with those blogs, feel free to log on to the website that was just posted here in the chat, and you can sign up there. Let me introduce Jodi. So, Jodi Salata received her master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy and her bachelor's degree in Psychology from Northwestern University. She completed her training at the Betty D. Harris Clinic at the Family Institute in Evanston, and she currently works full-time as a clinician at Cutting Edge Counseling. Jodi specializes in working with families, couples, children, and adolescents that have concerns with depression, grief, couples and family conflict, self-esteem, life transitions, anxiety, and other child and adolescent issues. So without further ado, I'm going to pass the baton over to Jodi to get started.

Jodi Salata, ALMFT Cutting Edge Counseling ([02:07](#)):

Hi, thank you. Thank you so much. Thanks for everyone.



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Dr. Lisa Novak ([02:10](#)):

Thanks for being here.

Presentation

Jodi Salata ([02:10](#)):

Appreciate it. Thanks for the honor to be here today. So I'm going to share my presentation here. I think this is a constant struggle for so many parents to know when is my kid, okay? What's normal for my kid to be presenting at their age groups? So we'll kind of run through some of the signs that we see. First, I want to let you know you're not alone.

([02:36](#)):

This is a problem for a lot of people. Twenty percent of teenagers between ages of 13-18 live with a mental health condition. So I want you to know you're not alone out there, and it's important that you seek support if you need it. Some of the most common illnesses we see in children are often depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders. You can see, see it broken up here by age. Additionally, things we like to watch out for are also social phobias. These are severe feelings of self-consciousness or insecurity in social settings.

ADHD, there are three types of ADHD. So sometimes kids present in that typical thought of ADHD behavior, which is very impulsive and hyperactive. They can't sit down. But there's also inattentive where kids are often very distracted, forgetful and these are more on the severe and then you can have a combination of both of those symptoms. Other things to watch out, for is eating disorders. They can come in a range of between bingeing, severe calorie restricting and purging, which is throwing up.

Something else to watch for of course is autism spectrum disorder. So this is often, ASD is impairment in communication and social interactions. So if you guys want to learn more about those, you can absolutely look it up. And I have some resources at the end of the slideshow that can give you some



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more information around that. Additionally, with kids, we want to be able to watch out for self-harm. And self-harm is often cutting behaviors, burning behaviors, or other types of things that kids can do to help deal with the psychological pain they're experiencing. These are typically not suicidal behaviors. Very scary stuff to talk about.

So, signs to watch out for, for your kids. There's a big long list. Some of the most visible signs you see are a decline in grades. You can see your kids really isolating or withdrawing from friends and family. They have trouble concentrating, excessive worry, changes in any big behaviors, big mood swings.

Also, something that not everybody watches for is psychosomatic symptoms. And I think it's important to understand that psychosomatic doesn't mean they're fake. They're actually really happening. They're experiencing these symptoms, but there's maybe no medical reason for them.

IS MY KID OK? EARLY SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES

Signs to watch for:

- Changes in eating behaviors and/or weight
- Extreme mood swings
- Decline in grades
- Loss of interest in activities and hobbies
- Lack of motivation and/or energy
- Sleep issues
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Isolating
- Hopelessness language
- Self-medicating
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Excessive worry
- Problems concentrating/confusion
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- Obsessive about weight or appearance
- Psychosomatic symptoms: Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing "aches and pains")

So, signs to watch out for, for your kids. There's a big long list.

CATCH

(05:31):

So, behavioral signs to watch for is hitting. Kids having these big reactions to seemingly really small problems. They're super disrespectful, aggressive and violent hitting, throwing things. And then of course, throwing big tantrums are all signs that your kids are having a lot of emotions that they might not know what to do with.



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I wanted to throw this in here because it's important to know, when do I act in an emergent situation? When do I know we need immediate help? These are some of the signs to really think about if your kid might be considering suicide. They tend to withdraw from life in a very severe way. They're disinterested in anything. There's a lot of hopelessness language. Increase in risky or self-destructive behaviors. Obsession with death. Talking about not having really future plans can be something to be watchful for. And at this point, if these are some of the signs you are seeing, you can reach out for community support. Talk to the school and see maybe if this is something we immediately move towards or what are our support options? If you are really concerned that there are some risky behaviors happening you can take your child, there's threats of suicide, take them seriously. Take your child to the emergency room to be evaluated. If they're refusing to go, you can call 911.

Alright, now the more hopeful step. How do we get to support our kids who are seemingly really struggling in life? And I think one of the important things to do is to create a safe space for your children to come to you with their concerns. And in order to do that, you want to really pay attention to your reaction when your kids bring you things.

[\(07:46\):](#)

Kids internalize everything. They think everything's about them. So if you have big reactions to concerns that they bring to you, it's going to reduce their desire to come and share things with you. So trying to stay calm and keeping a non-reactive place is really important for kids. You want to be able to validate their experience, even if you disagree with what's happening for them. You want to be able to pull out the emotional words that they're speaking about and validates that for them. Meaning, "I can see you're really frustrated and angry. I can understand why you feel that way." This helps kids feel I'm safe to come to you if I'm having concerns or issues. You want to stay out of problem solving. So typically, parents will want to jump right into, "Oh, you have a problem, I'm going to fix it for you, here's what you do." That helps makes kids feel invalidated and that you're really not listening to them. And so you absolutely can help them problem solve, but you first want to make sure you're keeping your reaction small and you're validating first. You don't want to pry too much. Kids don't want to feel interrogated when they're coming to you. So try not to ask too many questions, but you want to definitely lead with curiosity on their experience and try to stay in a non-judgmental perspective. You really want to take the



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time to listen, to understand your kids' perspective and what they're going through. Try not to make too many assumptions. It's really important as a parent to stay very emotionally regulated. So if you are feeling yourself escalate when your kid is talking about something, it's really important to take deep breaths and remain calm so that kids aren't taking this personally, that you're getting angry with them for bringing you concerns. That you're able to support them and have their back to figure out how best to navigate some of these situations.

(10:04):

Other ways you can help support your kids, of course, working on building your connection with them. This again helps build that safe space where they feel they can come and talk to you. So you want to ask more specific questions. You ask the question, "Hey, how was your day?" My kids are always like, "Eh, eh." They don't really want to share anything because it's a very big, broad question. So you can ask more specific questions. "Who did you sit with at lunch? How was your art project teacher today? How did this test go for you?" Asking them more specific questions helps them open up to you.

(10:43):

It's also important for you to model healthy behaviors for your kids. There's things you want your kids to be doing. It's important that you're also doing that. So if it is you want them to exercise. It's important that you are also exercising or showing these healthy behaviors, healthy eating, those types of things, emotionally regulating yourself. Another great way to support your kids is to help them regulate their emotions. So again, you are having to first regulate yours, stay calm, and then when your kid is upset, you can stay in that calm state and help them calm down by showing them that you have their back, that you are there to support them.

(11:34):

A lot of kids I see in my practice and teenagers especially tend to get really overwhelmed with the amount of things on their plate. One of the ways we help navigate that is helping them develop a plan of action to accomplish the things they need to accomplish. So, I help kids decide what's the priority? How do we prioritize and how do we start knocking things out? This can be very helpful, especially for kids who are struggling with anxiety. Kids typically aren't always lazy. Oftentimes they are actually just



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overwhelmed and stressed out. So helping them develop this plan of a step-by-step process helps them feel more in control and able to start checking their boxes of things they have to get done. Typically, I will do this with them and then check in. If they're unable to continue to develop, execute the plan, you continue to break it in half for them until it feels easy enough for them to get it started. Hardest part of this is really helping them get it started and anxiety really often gets in the way of them being able to do that. Another great way to develop connection in the family is to engage your kids in activities. You want to build your relationship with them. You can ask them to cook dinner. Let's go for a walk. That helps them feel they're a part of something bigger than themselves and kids are often more likely to open up and share and talk about themselves and what's going on with them if they're engaged in activity.

[\(13:29\)](#):

Research has shown that positive reinforcement is one of the best ways to motivate kids and to help them engage in desired behaviors. So you really want to catch them being good. So especially if you have behaviors that you want to increase or decrease, you really want to positively reinforce the ones that you're seeing. So, praise them for the things that they're doing really well. Sometimes when kids are struggling, they start to feel really badly about themselves. I can't do anything. I am no good. And so this will really help reinforce for them that there are a lot of good things that they're doing and things that they're good at and that they're good. And it's important to also praise their efforts versus their results. So, praise their amount of studying they did, not the A they got.

Sleep is super important for our kids. If they are unable to get enough sleep, their irritability goes up, their ability to concentrate goes down. So we want to make sure that they're getting enough sleep. And I know that's an issue for a lot of, especially their teenage years.

[\(14:47\)](#):

Exercise is a great way for kids to navigate stress. Feel good hormones come out when we exercise. Thirty minutes of exercise a day research has shown is just as beneficial as SSRIs. It's important for kids to move their bodies and it doesn't have to be, "Hey, go get on a treadmill for 30 minutes," or something like that. Just encourage your kid to move their body as much as possible.



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Encouraging healthy relationships is a really great way to help improve your kid's sense of wellbeing. Healthy relationships are shown from research to be the biggest indicator of wellbeing in people. So if your kid is struggling, encourage them to hang out with a friend that you approve of, that you think is a great influence on them, or help your kid find other ways to make friends through maybe an outside group of school or something like that. I think that could be really helpful.

([16:01](#)):

Helping kids build self-efficacy is another great way to help improve their wellbeing. Kids don't have a lot of control over their lives and of course that increases as they get older. Yet, they really struggle with feeling this balance between I'm being told what to do and I get to do what I want. And so helping them build their self-efficacy also helps build their self-esteem and self-confidence. Chores are a great way to do that. It also helps build a sense of belonging into the family. I added in there just to give a time frame because I wanted to add that no one likes to be told what to do this second. Not even us adults like to be told to do something right away. I often give kids a time frame in which to execute the chores. I will tell my kids, "Hey, empty the dishwasher before 5:00 PM when I get home from work today." Giving them an area of time, it just usually works. That's so much better.

You want to help kids build problem solving skills. When kids come to you and they have a problem or you feel like there's a problem, it is more beneficial to help them build the skills to solve those problems, guide them through it as opposed to just solving the problem for them. Get their input, get them involved in the decision making process. Again, this helps them build this sense of self-efficacy and it builds their self-esteem. You want to guide them through their adversities and not take over again that same type of thing. Don't just take care of everything for them. Help guide them through those challenges. Help them know that you got their back versus I'm just going to take care of it for you.

([17:55](#)):

I see a lot of kids who are unable to handle everyday stressors because parents tend to take over normal things that they can do for themselves. We want to help teach them to advocate for themselves instead of taking care of it for them. So, if I have a kid who's struggling in a class and I'm trying to help them



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problem solve and how to help themselves, it might be email your teacher. I'm not going to email the teacher for them. I'm going to say, can you email their teacher and ask for some help or guidance? That's the first step. And if that feels too challenging and they're unable to do it. I can sit with you and we'll draft that email together so they can build those skills to do it. But I won't do it for them. They've got to sit down and do it, but I got their back, going to support them through it.

[\(18:50\)](#):

Also, I think a lot of parents struggle around consequences and rewards versus punishments. I think this is an important way to help support your kids not to overly punish. Developing consequences for actions. And also rewards for kids are really helpful. One of the ways that I advise parents to do this is instead of having a punishment for not doing something, you want to help your child be in charge of their consequence. So if I've asked you to empty the dishwasher by 5:00 PM and you haven't done that, your consequence is you lose your phone until you do that. So they're in control of how long their punishment lasts.

[\(19:45\)](#):

So again, working on from a reward standpoint, if my kid wants to go buy the new \$20 Minecraft, I'm going to possibly build that into, "Okay, as long as you get this done all week long, then you can earn that \$20." Giving them rewards versus consequences or punishments can also be a great way to encourage desired behaviors for their kids.

Having a kid who's really struggling can be challenging as a parent, it's stressful and it's consuming at times. It's important to make sure that you are also getting the support that you need to be okay so that you can help your child be okay.

[\(20:44\)](#):

I know as a parent it's really challenging to know when it's appropriate to push your child and when to back off. And so, it's important to be gentle with yourself during that time. When you're dealing with anxiety, especially with kids, anxiety's often driven from this sense of, I'm scared to do this thing, but they're not going to get rid of their anxiety until they do that thing. And so, encouraging and helping

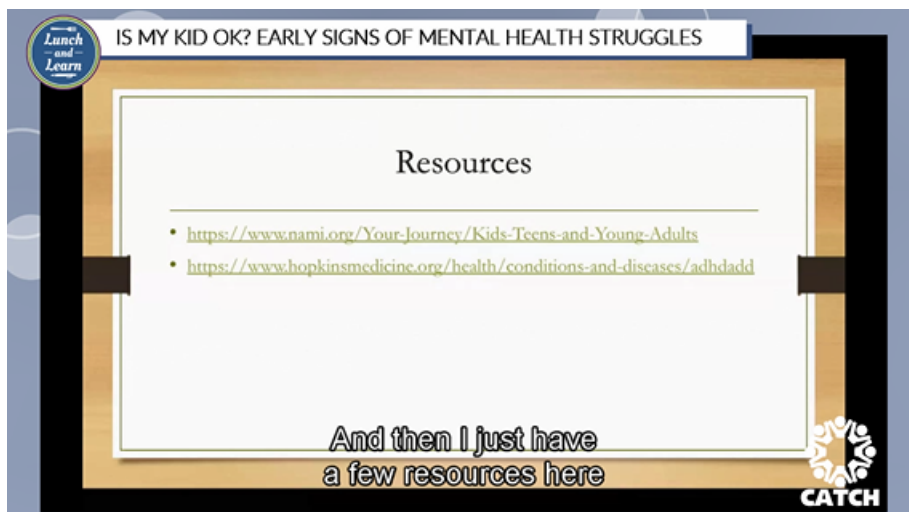


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your child push through these challenging events, sometimes it has to be a little bit more hand holding, sometimes not, but not allowing your kids to just not do anything is important. Besides when you're working with depression and anxiety, you want to be looking at it from two directions. One is you're trying to reduce the negative emotions and you want to increase the positive emotions. Helping them learn how to navigate their anxiety through doing the hard thing is really important.

And then I just have a few resources here for everyone.



Q&A

Dr. Lisa Novak ([22:14](#)):

Thank you Jodi. Thank you so much. We've gotten a few questions that have come in already. What I'm wondering if you could do actually is pull up that slide again that was towards the beginning that had that long list of some of the symptoms and behaviors and things we might look out for. And as you're pulling that up, I'm hoping that you could oh, and I had somebody in the chat actually asking if we could put the resource slide back up, which we can definitely do at the end. And I believe these slides will also be available to those who have joined us today. So you'll have access to that for sure. As we're looking at this list though, I'm wondering if you could share a little bit more about how we as parents can differentiate between what is just typical kid or teenage behavior versus what is truly a mental health problem. Recognizing that we all worry sometimes we all have the kind of day where we just want to go



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upstairs into our room and not talk to anybody or engage. How do we know when it moves away from this is normal, this is typical to, this is something that requires more attention.

Jodi Salata ([23:21](#)):

I think typically what you're seeing are more than one, maybe multiple symptoms and you're seeing patterns of it over a long period of time. So yes, if your kid, the symptom you're really seeing is excessive worry, but it feels consistent over time is something you are going to want to address with them. And because they might be developing more and more increases of anxiety. So if it becomes problematic where you feel it's getting in the way of their ability to function, that's another key sign. So if your kid is so worried that they don't want to go to school because of a test or they need to be called out and this is a pattern that you're beginning to notice, that would be a time where I would probably seek the intervention.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([24:13](#)):

Would you say the same thing about things like irritability? So if it's not necessarily excessive worry, but it's just moodiness, irritability. I'm kind of snapping at my parents when they're asking me how my day was.

Jodi Salata ([24:27](#)):

I think that's the hard one, because we see so much of this, especially in in teens as they're going through all those hormonal swings to notice what's normal and what's not. I would probably check in with my kid more often than not about what's happening for them. Helping them try to regulate themselves first would be the key I think. But again, if you start to see possible increases of that over time and maybe some of these other things happening, I would then begin to see intervention.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([25:06](#)):

And what about if we're seeing sort of an isolated behavior? Somebody asks the question, what about a 10 year old who slaps his chest when he makes mistakes? Is that a sign of a mental health concern?

Jodi Salata ([25:18](#)):



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It could be a flag for sure. It is a tendency to self-harm or beat yourself up because of what you're going through. So I would probably hit it from two different directions. If you feel like I would first try to work on growth mindset with my child and help them learn that it's okay to fail and it's okay to make mistakes, we all do that. And I think that I use a lot of sports reference because I have boys, but meaning like Michael Jordan doesn't make every single shot he's ever taken, right? Or even that he wasn't accepted onto the high school basketball team. Helping kids realize that failure is a normal part of the process and they're not supposed to know this stuff. That's why we're learning it can be really helpful, but the self-harm, I would watch because if it doesn't decrease then I would also seek intervention.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([26:16](#)):

That's great. That's really helpful. Thank you. And then I, I know if you don't mind just going back and leaving us on the resource page, that would be great for who had requested. While you're doing that, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about this idea of, we don't want to problem solve for our children and they typically don't love that, but at the same time we want to help them create, I think you said developing a privately plan of action is something that we want to do and we want to make sure that our expectations are reasonable and that they, they can achieve the goal. How do you balance those things and do that effectively without taking over?

Jodi Salata ([26:56](#)):

It's hard as parents because our own anxiety and like because we know the consequences we are, we know we know more. So what again I would say first is to regulate yourself to, to know that parenting from a calm space is the best place to be and your kids will be much more receptive to anything from that space. Moving into helping them problem solve it is short-term versus long-term goals. Thinking of it that way too. I can help you solve this problem, but I'm not giving you the skills to then future solve your future problems on their own. So if you could keep that in mind too, that you're going to sit with your kid and help them knock out a plan, actually really get their feedback, get them involved, is giving them long-term life skills versus just handling this one thing this one time cause they're going to face a lot of problems. And so these skills are vital to their wellbeing and navigating life.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([27:53](#)):



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Would you recommend that across the age range? If we're talking about a five year old versus a 17 year old?

Jodi Salata ([28:00](#)):

Yes. And of course it would be age appropriate. But yes, I would do the same exact thing for a little. I would ask first. Validate your kid. "That feels really stressful. I want to help you through it. What do you think we should do about that? Is there something you want to do?" I also think that kids are a lot more receptive, especially the older ones, when you speak from your own experience instead of telling them what they should do. If you speak from a place of, I have been through something similar like that and here's what I did and you offer it more as a suggestion, you might want to try that, what do you think about trying that? As opposed to, this is what you need to do. No one likes to be told what to do. And so the less we do that, the more apt kids are listening are going to listen and hear what we have to say.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([28:53](#)):

Thank you, Jodi. Tell us more about the somatic symptoms that you described. One parent wrote in and said at least once a week, my child can't get out of bed in the morning to go to school. He says he didn't sleep well. He complains of headaches, stomach aches or sore throats. We've taken him to the doctor. There doesn't seem to be anything physical going on, so we're assuming it's emotional. What should our next step be there?

Jodi Salata ([29:20](#)):

So, if you already kind of tried to sit down and talk to your kid about what might be going on at school I would then, that would be the first step of course is talking, see if you can get something from your kid about what may or may not be happening. Then I would check in with teachers to see if there's anything noticeable going on in school and maybe even reaching out to the counselors or the resources at school to maybe bring their kid in and see if they can have a chat with them about what might be going on to get a broader perspective because it feels like there might be something that's causing them not to want to go since these symptoms are showing up for them. And then, if nothing's moving in in that direction, I might seek out therapy at that point just to help see if my kid will open up and talk about what's going on with them.



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Dr. Lisa Novak ([30:14](#)):

We talk about the hot button issue of sleep. I know you had quipped That's a big one these days and obviously we know research tells us how important sleep is for our mental health and we also know that our kids, and especially our teens, are not getting enough of it these days. Do you have suggestions for families around how to navigate that topic? How parents can potentially avoid being overly controlling of I'm taking your phone at this time every night and we're plugging it into the kitchen or do you have those recommendations so that the kids do get adequate sleep?

Jodi Salata ([30:51](#)):

So of course, it always depends on the situation, but you can definitely develop patterns and I think helping the kids develop healthy sleep habits is important. Some kids need to listen to something to go to sleep. Does that have to be their phone? I don't know. Some kids need that sense of disruption to help settle their brain enough to go to sleep. I would try to present it to my child as less of a punishment but more as a habit. If I'm talking to my children about its best, if this is going to be the new rule, everyone is going to do it. We're all going to plug our phones into the kitchen and we're all going to go to bed at this time then it's not a punishment. I'm taking something away from you. This is a healthy behavior we're engaging in. I think that's a better perspective to take. And kids can often be really resistant to those types of things, especially if they've always had their own. Learning how to navigate that gently as more of a we're all going to do this can be more helpful too. Sleep is a big problem. I think that helping your kids maybe develop a structure around their sleep can be helpful. And that can be negotiable. So you set a bed time and they're resistant to it. And so I would say, hey, as long as you can get up and do your day well you can go to bed later. So I think working with your kid because you're working from a position of I want you to be happy and healthy as opposed to this is what you have to do and this is why you have to do it, is a better way to build the cooperativeness with your kid to work with them and figure out what works best for your family.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([32:43](#)):

I'm hearing that consistently from you. This idea of the language that we're using and just reframing things with a more positive lens than a more punitive negative lens can really have that impact for sure.



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Jodi Salata ([32:56](#)):

Yes. And also helps kids build this sense of one, we're in this together and I have some sense of control over my life. I'm not being controlled. Which reduces a lot of defiant disrespectful behaviors too.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([33:13](#)):

And what if a parent is trying that and they are still getting a lot of defiant or disrespectful behaviors or the level of dysregulation that they're seeing in their kids is pretty significant and hard to manage.

Jodi Salata ([33:29](#)):

Depending on the level, I advise parents to disengage with undesirable behaviors. Disengage with it. Do not get into a power struggle. Not knowing exactly why the kid is behaving this way, kids typically want to, they're good kids, they want to be good. So if they're not, there's a reason for it. If they're losing a sense of power or control over their life. If they're struggling internally with themselves. That's going to depend on how you hit this problem specifically. So I would say if it feels really severe, you can also reach out and get parenting coaching from therapists too. And it doesn't have to be long term. It can be two or three sessions where you're just getting some parental tips on your child specifically. But trying to disengage and keep yourself very regulated. Sometimes kids come at you because they want you to react. So disengage with them in that way. Engage with them in positive ways. Are some of the things to help decrease those behaviors. Don't engage when your kid is screaming at you, calling you names. I would say walk away.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([34:52](#)):

That's always a helpful and even just temporarily until everyone is diffused a little bit. You mentioned this idea of parent guidance work in therapy and I'm wondering if you can share a little bit more about how to know when our child should be going to therapy. When we should be getting parent strategies for how to manage our child's behavior. When it's indicated to do both. Especially in those situations where perhaps our kid or teen is quite resistant to going themselves. Should we be pushing them?

Jodi Salata ([35:37](#)):



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Yeah, that's hard because, on one end some kids are super resistant and the therapies can be very stagnant because they're disengaged with it. So one of the first steps might be the parents going in first and working towards family therapy. you're again modeling those healthy behaviors you want your kids to engage in sometimes you kind of push and just make them go and therapists will navigate that and hopefully they can open up and share and get used to it. Again, rewards, consequences. Working with your kids to say, "Hey our do you really think you're okay? Do you want to just try this thing out? Let's just do four sections and see how it goes?" And then, we can talk about it can be another very collaborative way to start to get your kid on board. Depending on the situation, I'm not above bribery with kiddos. So using your skills to do that. I'm a fan of a proactive approach.

If you come in with small problems, you have a lot less therapy to be done. I'm not saying run to the therapist for every little thing, but typically if you want to just get some parenting tips, you're having a hard time with helping your kid emotionally regulate, you could go one or two sessions and that's all you really need. There's nothing wrong with that. So thinking about if you navigate small problems with support, they don't turn into big ones.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([37:17](#)):

You touched on this reward piece again. And I'm laughing because I also am not above bribery, but I do feel this way sometimes as a parent and certainly also have this conversation with the families that I work with around should we be rewarding our kids for so many different things? Or, is that really impacting their development of intrinsic motivation? Are you doing these chores at your house because you're going to be earning a reward for them or are you doing chores because we all help out in this family and that's just what we do. Can you speak to whether there's a downside to implementing a reward system?

Jodi Salata ([37:56](#)):

I think that it is an important thing if your child already has intrinsic motivation to do something, you do not want to reward them for that. But if they're not going to have it, we don't know if you're just automatically going to build intrinsic reward. I believe that rewards are great ways to increase positive



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behaviors. They're shown to work really well with kids over punishing behaviors. So do I think we can overly reward? Sure. Especially monetarily, I am not a fan of monetary rewards for kids, especially young ones. I'm more of a fan of, especially for the younger kids, they really want your time and attention. I work to build rewards that are, if you do these things, you get 20 extra minutes of just you and I time and we are going to do anything that you want to do. Or even, "Hey, I'm going to take you out to a movie, if you get all these things done." Using it as a time for connection really helps more than monetary rewards or prizes or toys.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([39:10](#)):

I love that.

Jodi Salata ([39:11](#)):

You really want that, especially when they're younger. And your teenagers, they act like, "Oh, we don't, want to spend any time with you. We don't want anything about you." That's true and not true. They actually do want your approval. They really do want your positive attention.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([39:28](#)):

What approach would you suggest for a child who seems more emotionally and intellectually mature than their chronological age? Sometimes it gets confusing in trying to find that balance.

Jodi Salata ([39:41](#)):

I'm sorry, can you repeat that? The first part of the question?

Dr. Lisa Novak ([39:42](#)):

What approach would you suggest for a child who seems more emotionally and intellectually mature than their chronological age? Sometimes it gets confusing in trying to find that balance.

Jodi Salata, ALMFT Cutting Edge Counseling ([39:56](#)):

I'm confused about approach for what though?

Dr. Lisa Novak ([40:00](#)):



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I've seen it happen both ways. Where the chronological age is higher, but the maturity levels not there yet. And then the other way around also, where intellectually you're having a more mature conversation with somebody, but they're still kind of a younger kid. And so how do we balance the parenting or looking for signs of struggles?

Jodi Salata ([40:38](#)):

I do think too it's important to remember even though your kid intellectually can present very mature, they still experienced wise are very young. It is important to remind yourself how old your kid really is. At least in some of that emotional stuff. So don't lose sight of their actual age. And you have a child who's older but seems younger or emotionally immature. I would navigate to the age they present, especially with emotional regulation.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([41:14](#)):

Great, thank you. I just want to follow up about the reward piece. How do you handle it? If you've set expectations, there's a reward at the end. But then, the child doesn't meet the expectations and you find that now they're down on themselves or self-critical or they feel like it was a punishment because they didn't get the thing that they had essentially wanted. It feels like a stuck point I think in many families at that point. It's like, "Oh man, no, where do we go from here?" The thing isn't done. You're upset about it. I'm upset that the thing wasn't done.

Jodi Salata ([41:50](#)):

This is where I would lead with curiosity for my kid and also really encourage them. Yes, I know it hurts and it sucks that you didn't earn it this time, but we're going to try again and next time maybe we can get it right. So again, we want to normalize failure for them. It's okay. Absolutely okay. But also, if they didn't meet the mark, I'd be really curious as to why? Was the incentive not good enough that it didn't make enough sense to them? Developmentally too, for younger kids, the rewards have to be more immediate because they don't have the ability to wait that long so they lose interest in the reward that is taking way too long for them to get. So that might be happening too. I would first really look at why we didn't succeed here and maybe make some adjustments. But then of course absolutely affirm my kid, validate their feelings, "It's terrible when you don't win something. I totally understand that. Let's



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keep trying.” That's the growth mindset that you're really helping them reinforce. And then when they do succeed next time, really celebrate with them in their effort and how they got there.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([43:17](#)):

How you respond to a kid who lied? Things that I hear about in my office all the time such as we have rules around healthy eating, but then they're sneaking food and they're lying about it and I'm finding wrappers and they're lying about not using their screens or they're lying about the fact that their homework is completely done, but they haven't actually finished their homework.

Jodi Salata ([43:51](#)):

So again, I think this is age appropriateness. When kids are a lot younger, depending on the lie, I ignore it because oftentimes I find that kids will then come and share that they have lied. And so, we talk about that and why they felt the need to lie. Again, why are they lying? What's happening for them? What's the underlying driver that's causing them to want to lie? Are they feeling like a failure? Are they feeling like it's too much? Do you need to shift expectations around some of those things that might be important? I think it's important to hold kids accountable also, especially when they're older, about what they're lying about. But I would try to do it from a curious validating space as opposed to a judgmental punishing stance. What was happening for you? Why did you feel like you had to lie to me about this? It hurt my feelings that you're lying. I know you want to be honest. They don't want to struggle on their own. They don't want to go through all this. There's a reason why it's happening. Kids don't want to be bad. If you go from that fundamental perspective and approach, your approach is very different and it can open up a whole lot of connection between you and your kid.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([45:12](#)):

Can you talk a little bit about what you see in your office related to screen time and navigating that?

Jodi Salata ([45:20](#)):

The research is bad around screen time. It is not great. Yet, it is the way of our world in a lot of ways. So, I do think it's important to decrease screen time, especially if your kids on it a lot. If you are wanting to implement changes, I wouldn't be super extreme and I would help your kid navigate what else to do



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instead. So if you're going from, we watch a lot of screens, do we want to watch a lot less screens? How am I helping my kids fill that time with activities that are engaging for them? And maybe even take the role in that too. Bring them in on being collaborative around the topic. How do we get outside? What are some things they might want to do instead? But screen time, it's a hard thing. I think everybody's talking about it. Because the research shows it's awful. It's not great. Yet our kids are on their computer all day at school and then they want to be entertained when they get home and they want to decompress. I think it's about finding balance and I think every family's balances can be a little bit different.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([46:34](#)):

And it's also part of their socialization these days too. I mean, it's chatting with friends and being on social media and even video games that they're online with their friends doing. It's a tricky beast that one.

Jodi Salata ([46:47](#)):

And too, you're weighing the options. So if you have a kid who's isolating a lot or doesn't have a lot of friends but has online friends and is gaming with them or talking to them online, that's a really good resource for them to be connected to other people. So we don't want to take that away unless we're able to really replace it with quality relationships. So that's something to consider.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([47:13](#)):

Somebody just wrote in my kid is talking about getting a summer job and some of his ideas of places to work could be really challenging for him. Is it my role to speak up or just let him end up with a job that I think he's probably going to hate?

Jodi Salata ([47:27](#)):

I wonder if that's the "right hood" of childhood. To figure out what job you like and what you don't like. I'd guide your kid a little bit. But again, become collaborative in that experience. Why do you want this job? What do you think you're going to like about it? What's good about it? What are you interested in learning? But I think some of it is getting the job and finding something they don't like to do also steers



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them towards what they are going to like to do. So it's not always a bad thing to let them struggle. It's actually a really good thing to let them struggle when they know you have their back.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([48:05](#)):

I think that is very hard thing for many parents is watching our kids struggle and knowing that it's building their resilience in the long run. But in that short term, it is tricky and I think to that point, you brought up something about you didn't use this word, but essentially accommodating our kids' anxieties. And how if our child is anxious about something and we let them avoid that thing, it's only going to make them more anxious. Is the suggestion then the exact opposite that whatever they're anxious about, throw them into it? Or do you typically recommend a more gradual approach to that? How do we navigate those situations?

Jodi Salata ([48:50](#)):

If you can cut it down to a gradual process, I would recommend that. It's almost like exposure therapy a little bit. I had a kid who was very resistant to going school and had waited so long to go to school that they were incredibly anxious about going to school. So the first step was to get into the car, we got into the car. Okay, how are you feeling? Checking in, how's that going? And the next step beyond that was just to drive to school and come back home. So that feels more safe, more comfortable. Not everything can be broken down, but that's my first recommendation. You can break it down. You have your kids back. You're encouraging them to go through with this. The whole way, checking in, helping them breathe. It's okay, you are safe, regulating as much as possible, but not everything can be done like that. At some point it, we've got to push through. So, you've got to find a way to help them just do the thing. But if it can be gradual as much as possible, that is better.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([49:53](#)):

Thank you. One big thing that's come up for me a lot in my practice is that parents describe a ton of difference in their child's behavior at home and at school. So they will say we are having a very difficult time at home. There's a lot of dysregulated behavior. My child is melting down. It is hours of upset every day at the end of the day. But we've been talking to the school team and the school says everything is



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fine. The teacher sees no concerns, they're social, they're active, they're getting their work done. And I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit to what you think that's about or what you're seeing when the behavior is just not consistent across settings.

Jodi Salata ([50:39](#)):

It could be a couple of different things. Kids tend to be on their absolute best behavior when they're at school. And so they're holding in everything and it takes a lot of their cognitive energy to do that. So when they come home, they don't have anything left. So that's sometimes when you see a lot of these acting out behaviors, especially in the littles. So that would be, does your kid need some downtime, some quiet times. Reducing any of the sensory input as much as possible to give your kid time to restore and regenerate. Also, the boundaries can be very different from school versus at home. So, I would look to parents to say, okay, how is your consistency with your parenting? Are there some boundaries we have to put in place to help know that there are rules here, that there are guidelines we have to act differently at school. And, home is safe for kids, so they come home and they're their full selves. They're going to just let loose. They're not as concerned about how they behave. So there could be just some of that too. So, I think it's really hitting it from all angles can help you decide that.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([52:04](#)):

And in those situations, do you recommend ever, that the parents try to work with the school team on any of that? Like to help them not have to work so hard during the school day? Or does that feel since the school's not seeing the issues present in the building, that it's more of a how do we manage this at home type of situation?

Jodi Salata ([52:26](#)):

Depending on the resources at your school, I might contact the teacher and say, what works for you here? Do you ever notice anything? What do you guys implement? That might be a helpful resource in how to get started of what's working at school versus what's working at home. I guess that's an interesting question. If it would be necessary to talk about how to shift what's happening at school for them.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([52:56](#)):



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I have one last question here and we just have a few minutes left.

The one that I have here is a question about neurodivergence. You mentioned on that list right at the beginning that things like autism spectrum, ADHD are sort of things to watch out for, to look for the symptoms of. If you do have a neurodivergent child, does any of the information you've shared here change? Is there anything you would add or do differently? How do we factor that into this process?

Jodi Salata ([53:30](#)):

That's a great question. I think a lot of the tips and tools in this presentation help across the board for all kids. Do I think there has to be adjustments for your child? If there's some differences, then absolutely. But I think it might be child specific or dependent upon what you are having to navigate. I know that's an unsatisfactory answer, but I don't know that I can speak to a broad spectrum on that topic.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([54:01](#)):

It's not an unsatisfactory answer. These tools are such helpful tools and I guess maybe it's also just a matter of making sure that whatever our expectations are for our children are realistic and that the same expectations aren't realistic for every eight-year-old or every 14-year-old. And so, it kind of depends on their skill sets and what abilities they have. And we have to be flexible as parents and adjust accordingly, which is hard.

Jodi Salata([54:31](#)):

Very hard and can feel very isolating as a parent too. And that's why I added make sure you're okay. Make sure you are getting the support that you need because there are people out there going through similar situations and it's nice to be able to have that support versus trying to compare yourself to people who are in a very different position than you are.

Dr. Lisa Novak ([54:55](#)):

Well thank you so much Jodi. We so appreciate your expertise and having you here to share your wisdom with us. I just want to mention two additional things that are coming up for those of you that are listening here. We have two great events. One is Self-Regulation is Your Parenting Superpower. That's on Wednesday, April 12th at Noon. That is a mindful movement workshop for parents. And then our next Lunch and Learn on Tuesday, April 18th at Noon is about Little Kids, Big Kids and Really Big



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Feelings. Really helping to parse apart some of the more dysregulated behavior that we're seeing, why we're seeing such an uptick in that behavior and some additional strategies for how to best manage that. So thank you all for joining us today and thank you again, Jodi, for being here and sharing your wisdom with us.