

APPLICATION EXERCISES

How Can I Apply This Tool?

1. When you see an emotional reaction from a kid or teenager, try to respond first with empathy. Use the phrase, "I can see that you feel . . ." Practice making your first response a right brain response to encourage an emotional exhale. Ask questions about how they are feeling. If possible, pull up a feelings chart or wheel. If that's not readily available, have a few feeling words available as examples.

Do you feel ...

- Lonely?
- Hurt?
- Angry?
- Embarrassed?
- Ashamed?
- Alone?
- Afraid?

2. We know that kids and teenagers can experience a roller coaster of emotions—calm one minute and hysterical the next—and still be normal. However, when you observe signs that appear to extend beyond teenage moodiness or kid brooding, it's important to intervene. Here are some ways:

- Be aware of the classic signs of depression such as sadness, tearfulness, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, difficulty concentrating, changes in sleep and/or appetite, and loss of interest in friends or typically enjoyable activities. If these signs persist on a daily basis, consider scheduling an evaluation with a pediatrician or therapist.
- Check in. Talk to your kid or teen about the changes in mood or behaviors you've observed. In the conversation, try to determine if what they are experiencing is something that they believe they can eventually tackle or if life feels overwhelming right now. Encourage the expression of all emotions, even the really strong and complicated ones. Keep in

mind that if emotions aren't freely expressed, they get bottled up and eventually leak out in unexpected ways.

- Seek professional support. If you think your kid or teen may be severely depressed, or if you have concerns about his or her safety, it's important to seek out professional support. Unfortunately, clinical depression isn't likely to improve on its own. Don't know where to begin? Start with a medical health provider like a pediatrician, family doctor, or school nurse.
3. If a kid in your life says something that concerns you, here are things that you can do in the moment:
- Express empathy for their distress, "It sounds like things are really hard for you right now. It doesn't seem like you have much hope that things will get better. Is that right?"
 - Then ASK directly: **Are you thinking about hurting yourself?** Avoid using the word "suicide." That word may not connect with a kid or teen who is thinking about hurting themselves. They may not be that far in their thoughts or understand the weight of those terms.
 - Be sure to share your concerns with a healthcare provider. If you are a ministry leader or coach, tell the kid or teen's parents immediately.