



Quick Tips for Providers: *Discussing Somatization with Children and Families*

Validate the Child/Family's Experience

Somatization occurs when emotions are expressed as physical symptoms. Having these experiences can be confusing, frustrating and/or scary for children and their caregivers. But providers can help.

- Take time to genuinely understand the experiences shared.
- Offer respect to the presenting symptoms and empathy for the family's perspectives and experiences.
- Use the opportunity to model support and acceptance of the child's negative emotions.

Talking to Kids about Somatic Symptoms

Use clear language, help the child and family understand that what the child is feeling is normal, and emphasize that the symptom(s) are real, not "made up."

- "Our brains and our bodies are always talking to each other! This is called the *mind-body connection*."
- "Everyone's body has a different way of showing feelings and responding to stress. Stress is what you feel when you are worried, afraid, or uncomfortable about something."
- "When I'm afraid or worried, I often feel butterflies in my stomach, my hands get sweaty and my heart starts to beat quickly. What do you [child] feel in your body when you're nervous or scared?"
- "Sometimes these messages are SO STRONG that they may make us feel sick. This is just how our brains talk to our bodies, and it's saying we're under a lot of stress!"

Mindfulness Strategies Can Help!

Mindfulness techniques give children tools for self-regulating, which in turn allows them to pause and reset.

Blow bubbles
Take a walk

Practice belly breathing
Take 10 breaths

Meditate
Color, draw or paint

For more information, please visit: https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Physical_Symptoms_of_Emotional_Distress-Somatic_Symptoms_and_Related_Disorders-124.aspx

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