Supporting Child and Youth Mental Health
Children, by nature, are social beings. Children learn through social relationships, play, and other opportunities to practice and develop their skills and receive feedback. It’s important that as parents, caregivers, and educators, we recognize and understand that typical development may be affected when children are distressed by the pandemic due to the social distancing, reduced time in classroom and reduced opportunities to learn and practice new skills. In the home, in classrooms that may look like behavioral outbreaks or tantrums, difficulty following direction, or difficulty with peers. These may be distressing behaviors versus maladaptation. Fortunately, with ongoing connected support, many of these children can gain those skills and get back on track developmentally. For youth who were already struggling with mental health challenges before the pandemic, the impacts of the pandemic may have exacerbated those concerns. We know treatment is effective and can bring prolonged benefit to those who are being treated.

As the U.S. Surgeon General noted in his recently released advisory on youth mental health, “Supporting the mental health of children and youth will require a whole-child, whole-family, whole-society effort.” It’s all of us, as families and community members looking at how we create environments of connection and support. We all need to care for our mental health as a component of our overall health. There are actions we can take for ourselves and our loved ones, and there are effective treatments and interventions.

May is Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month
Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) can occur any time during pregnancy as the first year after childbirth, making the leading complication of childbearing. Both common and treatable, as many as 1 in 5 pregnant or postpartum Vermonters suffer from symptoms of depression and/or anxiety during the perinatal period. Both common and treatable, as many as 1 in 5 pregnant or postpartum Vermonters suffer from symptoms of depression and/or anxiety during the perinatal period. Early national data suggests these rates have increased to at least 1 in 3 since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is evidence that fathers, partners, foster/adoptive parents, and other caregivers are similarly at risk from the stress of welcoming a baby.

Symptoms include feeling overwhelmed, irritable, weepy, empty, loss of interest, exhausted but unable to sleep, having scary or unwanted thoughts, and/or just not feeling like yourself. Left untreated, PMADs can have a profound and lasting impact on entire families. Universal screening for PMADs is a critical step in improving the mental health and well-being of pregnant and postpartum people, their children and families, and our communities. Vermont Department of Mental Health

Culture is a Protective Factor
For the Aboriginal youth, creating a sanctuary, performing a sacred dance, or listening to traditional stories is not just a part of their culture; it is a part of their way of being. These practices connect youth to their heritage, community, and ancestors. This feeling of belonging and that they matter can give them the strength to cope in the face of adversity. Culture is a Protective Factor

There is a relationship between social media use and anxiety and psychological distress, it is not that simple. Caregivers and youth can apply to how all of us may be impacting other aspects of the mental impact stress, contributes to sedentary behavior, may comparing themselves to others, or contribute to feelings of missing out. But social media also may allow “safe” for some youth to connect with others, to find social support without stigma, although the quality of that social support may vary. Some helpful resources for families to learn more about social media use among youth can be found below.

 Worship, Prayers, and Mindfulness
         • Sermon with Rev. Karen Doane
         • WebTalk: Helping Children Use the Web Wisely (abemedia.org)
         • Podcast on the power technology has over our lives.
         • Your Unbridled Attention Podcast – Center for Human Technology

Social media can hurt. Here are 6 ways to reduce its harms (fastcompany.com)