



Parenting Through Mental Health Challenges



A supportive guide from Exceptional Wellness Counseling to help you strengthen connection, communication, and emotional safety with your child.

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How to Use This Workbook

Parenting through emotional or behavioral challenges can feel overwhelming, isolating, and exhausting. This workbook is designed to help you reflect, reconnect, and build tools that support both your wellbeing and your child's. Move through these exercises at your own pace. There is no “perfect” way to do this — only curiosity, compassion, and practice.

Section 1: Understanding Your Child's Emotional World

Exercise 1: What's Really Going On?

Reflect before addressing concerns with your child.

Prompts:

- ❖ What behaviors or changes I've noticed...
- ❖ What worries me most...
- ❖ What I believe might be beneath the behaviors (stress, sensory needs, friendships, academic pressure, big emotions)...

Example:

"Meltdowns after school seem more frequent. I worry she's overwhelmed. This may be related to social stress and end-of-day fatigue."

Exercise 2: My Parenting Triggers

Prompts:

- ❖ I feel most overwhelmed when my child...
- ❖ I tend to react by...
- ❖ What I want to do instead is...

Example:

“I feel overwhelmed when my child shuts down. I react by raising my voice. I want to pause and approach them calmly.”

Section 2: Communication That Supports Growth

Exercise 3: Connection Before Correction Practice

A powerful parenting principle:
Regulate → Connect → Teach.

Example:

❖ “You’re fine, stop crying.”

→ “It looks like you’re having a big feeling. I’m here with you.”

Your turn:

“I usually say...” → “A connection-based version might be...”

Exercise 4: Emotion Coaching Script

Use this 3-step formula often taught in EWC family therapy:

1. Name it:

“It seems like you’re feeling...”

2. Normalize it:

“It makes sense that you’d feel this way.”

3. Support it:

“I’m right here. We’ll get through this together.”

Reflection:

- ❖ Which step feels most natural to me?
- ❖ Which step feels uncomfortable or new?

Example:

Name: “It looks like you’re frustrated.”

Normalize: “Anyone would feel that way after a long day.”

Support: “Let’s take a breath together.”

Section 3: Tools to Strengthen Emotional Regulation

Exercise 5: Create a Coping Menu Together

Work with your child to identify calming options they might choose when overwhelmed.

Ideas to include:

- ❖ Movement break
- ❖ Quiet corner with sensory tools
 - ❖ Drawing, writing, art
 - ❖ Music
- ❖ Deep breathing or grounding
- ❖ Talking to a trusted adult
- ❖ Weighted blanket, hugs, comfort item

Ask your child:

- ❖ “Which three help you feel calmer when you’re overwhelmed?”

My child’s top 3 calming tools:

Exercise 6: Family Calm-Down Plan

Complete this together as a family:

- ❖ Signs I'm starting to feel overwhelmed are...
 - ❖ When I notice these signs, I can...
- ❖ When you notice them, you can help me by...

Example:

Signs: "Tight chest, louder voice."

I can: "Take space for 2 minutes."

You can: "Gently remind me of our plan."

Section 4: Strengthening the Parent–Child Relationship

Exercise 7: Weekly Connection Moments

Choose 1–2 per week:

- ❖ 10 minutes of one-on-one “special time”
 - ❖ Short walk or shared activity
- ❖ Evening check-in: High/Low of the day
 - ❖ Reading or cooking together

Reflection:

- ❖ Which connection moment did my child respond to most?

Exercise 8: Understanding Their Needs

Prompts:

- ❖ What does my child need emotionally right now?
 - ❖ What helps them feel safe?
 - ❖ What tends to overwhelm them?
- ❖ What do I want them to remember about how I supported them during this time?

Example:

“I want them to remember that even when things were hard, I stayed present and patient.”

Section 5: Action Plan for Parents

Exercise 9: Support Network Map

List supports for both you and your child:

- ❖ Family/friends
- ❖ School team (teachers, CST, counselors)
- ❖ Pediatrician or prescriber
- ❖ Therapist / IOP / local community resources

Reflection:

- ❖ Who should we reach out to this week?

Example:

“We will contact the school counselor and schedule a therapy check-in.”

Exercise 10: Parent Commitment Statement

Write individually or together:

“I commit to supporting my child with patience, empathy, and curiosity. I will focus on understanding their emotions, building coping tools together, and creating a home where feelings are welcomed.”

How EWC Can Support Your Family

If your child is struggling with emotions, behavior, anxiety, school stress, or big transitions, you do not have to navigate it alone.

Exceptional Wellness Counseling has a **dedicated team of child, adolescent, and family therapists** who specialize in creating safe, collaborative, and nurturing spaces for growth.

We offer:

Play therapy

CBT & DBT-informed approaches

EMDR

Parent coaching & family therapy

Immediate in-person and virtual availability

If you'd like to learn more about how our team can support your family:

 **Call or text: 908-415-2042**

 **Email: info@exceptionalwellnesscounseling.com**

 **Learn more: www.exceptionalwellnesscounseling.com**

You are not alone. We're here to walk alongside you—every step of the way.

