



Kids Aren't Immune to Farm Stress: Proactively Addressing Children and Youth's Mental Health on the Farm

Farmers face new challenges every season. With family farms pulling double-duty as homes and workplaces, those challenges are bound to come up around the dinner table. And that can impact children and youth. Children and youth aren't immune to stress on the farm, so here are a few tips to help address farm stressors with your kids.

Start a conversation

Kids often hear about challenges affecting the farm but may not fully understand what's going on. Talk to them about the situation and explain what's being done to address it. If an emergency event, like wildfire or flood, is likely, explain to them what is happening and reassure them of their safety.

Check in

Make a habit of regularly checking in with them to see how they are feeling. This can help to spot changes in their behaviour and make them more comfortable talking about issues. Use open-ended questions ("What's going on?") without being confrontational to encourage conversation.

Give them time to play and socialize

Farm kids start working on the farm from a young age. But don't forget that they're still kids. Chores are important, but make sure they have time to play or socialize, which can help with emotional regulation.

One-on-one time

One-on-one time with children and youth can make a huge difference. Find something they enjoy and spend time with them doing it, which can encourage them to open up about their feelings.

Set an example

Children and youth copy the behaviour that they see. Taking care of your own mental health with stress management and self-care can make it easier for kids to feel comfortable asking for help. Modelling positive coping behaviours can also help them develop healthy lifelong habits.

Watch for signs of stress

Withdrawing from friends and activities; sleeping excessively or trouble sleeping; self-harm; grades slipping; and acting out are examples of signs of stress in children and youth. Rather than fixing the behaviour, focus on what's troubling them and how you can help.

More mental health resources and information are available at www.agmentalhealth.ca
Emergency Preparedness resources and supports are available at www.agready.ca

