



## Day 4 – Childhood

### **Pray**

St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897, France) experienced great loss during childhood, losing her mother when she was only four years old. As a child, she appears to have struggled with severe anxiety. Yet she had a profound love for our Lord and dedicated her life to him as a Carmelite nun. Pope Francis has spoken of her [“spirit of humility, tenderness and goodness”](#) and stated [“\[t\]he Church needs hearts like Thérèse's, hearts that draw people to love and bring people closer to God.”](#)



*Jesus, you chose to enter this world as a child, and as an adult, you said “[I]et the children come to me” (Mt 19:14). Your infinite beauty is so clear in the face of every child. Yet we do not always know how to love and care for children the way they deserve. Teach us to love children more deeply and to respect their journey of growth, always modeling Christ’s peace to them. We pray particularly for children coping with mental illness and mental health challenges, and we resolve to work ever harder for systems that support children and help them thrive. Amen.*

*St. Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for us.*





NATIONAL CATHOLIC

**mental health**

CAMPAIGN

## ***Learn***

[National statistics](#) indicate mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, are increasing areas of concern in childhood. Children may not express depression and anxiety in ways that adults do. The internal level of distress caused by the feelings of depression and anxiety can lead children to behaviorally “act out” these internal feelings. These children need extra support and understanding.

When children, whether they are struggling with a mental illness or not, are overwhelmed by big feelings, it’s our job to model Christ’s peace to them. To raise mentally healthy children, it is essential that we teach them how to handle strong emotions.

[Emotional self-regulation is a very important part of childhood development.](#) It is often “caught,” not “taught,” by witnessing adults. We can model self-regulation by, for example, praying, singing, taking deep breaths, or counting to 10.

## ***Act***

Catholic schools and other parish ministries need to think proactively by developing approaches that help “inoculate” children with facilitative skills and strategies to use when feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has emphasized how important it is for the Church to accompany individuals through their challenges and struggles. The art of accompaniment offers the opportunity to create explicit processes to “walk the path” with children and their families from prevention through intervention. The sooner children see healthy, peaceful behaviors taught and modeled in response to daily life challenges—big and small—the better for everyone.

The [National Catholic Partnership on Disability \(NCPD\)](#) Council on Mental Illness and Wellness (CMIW) has created [several \(bilingual\) resources](#) on mental illness for all ages. NCPD works with dioceses, parishes, ministers, and laity to promote the full and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the Church.