

Mental Health Matters

Plain Talk about Your Child's Mental Health



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It's easy for parents to recognize when a child has a high fever. A mental health problem, however, may be more difficult to identify. Mental health problems can't always be seen. But, the symptoms can be recognized.

Mental health problems affect one in every five young people at any given time. Tragically, an estimated two-thirds of all young people with mental health problems are not getting the help they need.

Know the Warning Signs

A variety of signs may point to a possible mental health problem in a child or teenager. Some of these warning signs include:

Is troubled by feeling:

- really sad and hopeless without good reason, and the feelings don't go away;
- very angry most of the time, cries a lot, or overacts to things;
- worthless or excessive/persistent guilt;
- anxious or worried much more than other young people;
- grief for a prolonged time after a loss;
- constantly concerned about physical problems or appearance;
- frightened that his or her mind is controlled or is out of control.

Is limited by:

- poor concentration; can't make decisions;
- inability to sit still or focus attention;
- worry about being harmed, hurting others, or about doing something "bad";
- the need to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines dozens of times a day;
- thoughts that race almost too fast to follow;
- persistent nightmares.

Experience big changes, for example:

- does much worse in school;
- loses interest in things usually enjoyed;
- has unexplained changes in sleeping or eating habits;
- avoids friends or family and wants to be alone all the time;
- daydreams too much and can't get things done;
- feels life is too hard to handle or talks about suicide;
- hears voices that cannot be explained.

Behaves in ways that cause problems, for example:

- uses alcohol or other drugs;
- eats large amounts of food and then forces vomiting, abuses laxatives, or takes enemas to avoid weight gain;
- continues to diet or exercise obsessively although bone-thin;
- often hurts other people, destroys property, or breaks the law;
- does things that can be life threatening.

If your child has experienced any of these warning signs, seek help immediately. Talk to your doctor, a school counselor, or other mental health professional who is trained to assess whether or not your child has a mental health problem.

Every child's mental health is important. While mental health problems are quite common they can be treated effectively by mental health care professionals.

For more information on other mental health topics, go to our website at www.humanservicescenter.net



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