

Mental Health Awareness: The Middle School Years

Early identification and treatment are important when it comes to mental illnesses. Parents/guardians are often the first to notice when something is going on with their child or teenager. Moodiness and irritability can be a common response to the stress of school and the changes of adolescence.

So, when should parents/guardians be concerned?

Some of the signs that mean a child may need further help from a mental health professional or health care provider include:

- Less interested in school
- Dropping grades
- Does not show feelings
- Difficulty making or keeping friends
- Poor grades despite trying hard
- Constant worry or anxiety
- Persistent stomach aches or other body aches and pains
- Refusal to go to school
- Hyperactivity
- Difficulty focusing
- Low energy
- Does not seem to be having fun
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Sad for long periods of time
- Irritable
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Sleeping less or more than usual
- Frequent anger or acting out
- Self-Critical

When a child has more than one of these signs, the signs are intense, and they last for more than several weeks, parents/guardians should be concerned.

What Should a Parent Do Next?

Talking with your child or teen is always a good idea to learn more about what is happening in their life such as stress or bullying. Parents/guardians should also discuss their concerns with a professional, some possible professionals to contact are:

- Your child's pediatrician
- Your child's primary health care worker
- Your child's school counselor
 - 8th: Ms. Kunert
 - 7th: Ms. Bechard
 - 6th: Ms. Bechard (last names A-L) or Ms. Kunert (last names M-Z)
- ISD 196 Site-Based Mental Health Provider: ACP 612-455-8643

These professionals may give your child or teen a mental health screening to determine whether their symptoms may need follow up care.

Treatment/Possible Options

If a child or teen is diagnosed with depression, anxiety or another mental illness, there are a wide range of treatment options. If medication is presented as one, parents/guardians should weigh the risks and benefits and follow the recommendations regarding follow-up visits and monitoring side effects. It is important to note that there are **many effective approaches** that do not involve medications and that medication alone is not effective.

Source: NAMI Minnesota, 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS www.namihelps.org