

# Your Child's Mental Health



## Background

Research shows that it is not uncommon for mental health conditions to begin during childhood. Unfortunately, many children do not receive needed treatment and intervention services for these conditions. If untreated, mental health conditions can cause disruptions in all aspects of a child's life and lead to future difficulties, such as:

- Problems in school
- Involvement in the criminal justice system
- Substance abuse
- Increased risk of suicide

Mood and behavioral changes are normal for children and are usually unrelated to mental health conditions. It can sometimes be difficult to notice when a child is displaying symptoms of a condition. The observations of teachers and others who frequently spend time with your child are important in helping to identify potential warning signs. However, as your child's caregiver, you are in the best position to notice the signs.

## FAQ

### Q: What are some of the common warning signs of mental health conditions among children?

A: Some of the most common behavioral and emotional symptoms are:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor school performance  | <input type="checkbox"/> Big changes in personality                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal to go to school  | <input type="checkbox"/> Fighting or arguing with others                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches and other sicknesses  | <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble sitting still or concentrating most days |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty sleeping or nightmares                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Runs away from home                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prolonged feelings of sadness and loneliness                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Significant weight loss or weight gain           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Showing disinterest in favorite activities or is "too tired to play" | <input type="checkbox"/> Worries or fears "bad things will happen"        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Showing anger and hostility toward people and surroundings           | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking about death/suicide                      |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Acting younger than his/her age                  |

### Q: What might be causing these or other behavioral and emotional symptoms?

A: Some of the most common causes are:

- ▶ **Depression:** When a child feels sad or irritable for longer than two weeks.
- ▶ **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** When a child experiences difficulty controlling actions, paying attention, and being still.

- ▶ **Anxiety Disorder:** When a child constantly worries, feels anxious, and sometimes panics. He or she may refuse to go to school or sleep alone.
- ▶ **Eating Disorders:** When a child worries constantly about being fat. Anorexia is when a child starves him or herself. Children with bulimia may make themselves throw up to control their weight.
- ▶ **Learning Disabilities:** When the reading, math, and/or writing of a child are below expected age, school, and intelligence level. These children can become frustrated and discouraged, seeking attention through misbehavior and conduct problems.

However, there are many potential causes for these symptoms and a proper assessment and evaluation can only be provided by a licensed medical doctor or mental health professional.

**Q: Are these conditions treatable?**

A: Yes. Do not hesitate to speak with a mental health professional, pediatrician, local mental health authority, or school nurse/counselor if your child is displaying any of the above behaviors over an extended period of time or if you have any questions or concerns. Early diagnosis and treatment is important for preventing long-term problems and producing the best possible outcome for your child.

**Q: Does my child need medication?**

A: Medication is one common treatment for mental health conditions, but not the only treatment option. Several forms of therapy that are frequently used in the mental health treatment process have shown positive results both alone and in conjunction with medication. If your child is diagnosed with a mental health condition, the doctor or mental health professional will be able to discuss treatment options and make a specific recommendation.

## Mental Health Resources

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) • 1-800-273-Talk (8255)**

**Mental Health America of Texas**  
[www.mhatexas.org](http://www.mhatexas.org)  
[www.texassuicideprevention.org](http://www.texassuicideprevention.org)

**Mental Health America**  
[www.MentalHealthAmerica.net](http://www.MentalHealthAmerica.net)  
1-800-969-NMHA

**American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**  
[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)  
1-800-333-7636

**National Institute of Mental Health**  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**  
[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

**School Counselors, Doctors, Nurses,  
Mental Health Professionals**