




**Understanding Your Child's Mental Health:
Key signs to watch for and effective responses.**


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Dyslexia




ADHD




Slidebooks

Check out the helpful information in these slidebooks which cover topics like ADHD and executive functioning.



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For Child Care

October 28: Understanding Your Child's Mental Health: Key Signs to Watch For and Effective Responses.

November 18: Guiding Growth: Managing Children's Challenging Behaviors Through Calm, Consistency, and Co-Regulation.


February 6: Navigating Anxiety, Worries, and Obsessions: Understanding the Causes and How to Support Your Child

March 6 Depression, Mood Swings, and Low Self-Esteem: When to Be Concerned and How to Support Your Child

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For Child Care

Mental Health / Mental Illness



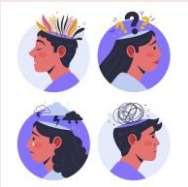
MENTAL HEALTH

- **Mental Health**
 - Refers to a person's overall emotional, psychological, and social well-being.
 - How we think, feel, and act, as well as how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.
 - A state of well-being where an individual can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their community.

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Mental Illness



- **Mental illness**
 - a wide range of mental health conditions
 - disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior.
 - Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors.


Many people have mental health concerns from time to time.

Becomes a *mental illness* when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect your ability to function.


- Make you miserable
- Cause problems in your daily life, such as at school or work or in relationships.


In most cases, symptoms can be managed with a combination of medications and psychotherapy.

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 **Why it can be hard for parents to detect....**


- Typical childhood growth is a process that involves changes.
- Symptoms can depend on the child's age.
- The child, particularly if young, may not be able to express or explain what they are feeling or why they are behaving the way they are.
- Beliefs and myths such as: they will grow out of it, they are just manipulating me, "kids will be kids."
- Concerns about stigma.
- Well-meaning others normalizing it – "my daughter was the same way" or "you did that, too, when you were little."
- Feeling churned up in ourselves.

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 **According to the CDC**

- 1 in 5 children aged 3 to 17 years in the US has a mental disorder.
- The most common mental disorders affecting children in the US are anxiety, depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and behavioral disorders.
- The pandemic exacerbated the mental health conditions experienced by children due to factors such as social isolation, disruptions of routines and support systems, and limited access to mental health services.

(Meng J.F, Wanitzer E. Factors Associated With Not Receiving Mental Health Services Among Children With A Mental Disorder in Early Childhood in the United States, 2021–2022. Prev Chronic Dis 2024;21:240126. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd21.240126>.)

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 **Misconceptions / Myths**


Children Don't Experience Mental Health Issues Many people believe that mental health problems are only adult issues. In reality, children can and do experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions.


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 **Misconceptions / Myths**

Children Will "Grow Out" of It


Some adults assume that children will naturally overcome mental health challenges as they grow. While some may improve, many issues require intervention and support to prevent long-term effects.


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 **Misconceptions / Myths**

Mental Health Problems Are a Result of Bad Parenting

While parenting styles can influence a child's mental health, many factors contribute, including genetics, environment, and individual experiences.



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 **Misconceptions / Myths**


Talking About Feelings Makes It Worse

Some believe discussing emotions and mental health can exacerbate problems. In fact, open conversations can help children feel understood and supported.


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 **Misconceptions / Myths**

Mental Illness Is a Sign of Weakness There's a stigma that mental illness is a personal failing. This misconception can prevent children from seeking help or discussing their struggles.

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 **Misconceptions / Myths**

All Kids Show Clear Signs of Distress Children may express their mental health issues in ways that aren't immediately recognizable, such as behavioral changes, withdrawal, or physical complaints.

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 **Misconceptions / Myths**

Therapy Is Only for Severe Cases Many think therapy is only necessary for severe mental health issues. In reality, therapy can be beneficial for a range of challenges, including everyday stressors and developmental issues.

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 **Misconceptions / Myths**

They either have a diagnosable illness OR they are fine.

This all-or-nothing thinking is flawed. Mental health/mental illness is a continuum.

Lot's of in between.

And if we catch them early, can make a huge difference!

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 **Misconceptions / Myths**

They already have X so they can't also have Y


Comorbidities are super common.

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 **General Classifications of Mental Illness in Children**

- Anxiety Disorders
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Eating Disorders
- Depression and other mood disorders (Bipolar)
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Adjustment Disorders
- Behavioral Disorders (ODD, CD)
- Learning Disorders
- Others


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Signs and Symptoms that your child may be struggling with their mental health


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- **Changes in Routine:** Sudden alterations in daily habits, like sleep patterns or eating habits.
- **Withdrawal from Activities:** Loss of interest in hobbies, sports, or socializing with friends.
- **Increased Defiance:** A noticeable rise in oppositional behavior or defiance toward authority figures.
- **Aggression or Irritability:** Frequent outbursts of anger or frustration that seem disproportionate to the situation.
- **Risky Behaviors:** Engaging in dangerous activities or substance use that they didn't previously partake in.


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- **Persistent Sadness:** Ongoing feelings of sadness or hopelessness that last for weeks.
- **Extreme Mood Swings:** Rapid shifts between emotional states, such as joy and deep sadness.
- **Excessive Worry or Anxiety:** Intense fears about everyday situations that interfere with normal functioning.
- **Low Self-Esteem:** Expressing feelings of worthlessness or self-criticism.
- **Emotional Numbness:** Difficulty expressing emotions or feeling disconnected from feelings or reality.

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 Anxiety Check

- **Difficulty Concentrating:** Struggling to focus on schoolwork or conversations, leading to a drop in academic performance.
- **Negative Thought Patterns:** Persistent negative thoughts or beliefs about themselves or the future.
- **Paranoia or Distrust:** Unwarranted feelings of suspicion or fear of others' intentions.
- **Memory Problems:** Difficulty remembering important information or events.
- **Overthinking:** Ruminating excessively on problems or situations, which can lead to increased anxiety.


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 Anxiety Check

So, what do we do?

- This is the first in a series, so we will go into some of these in more details...these are general places to start.


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 Anxiety Check

1. Watch and take notes

- Notice and jot down what you are seeing
- Write down all your concerns
- Write down the dates
- Write down what you did or didn't do about it
- Write down how that went


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 **2. Make home a supportive and open place**


- Consider their behavior – even the tough stuff – a form of communication.
- Do what you need to do to remain regulated and calm (yep – self care).
- Discourage any teasing, bullying from siblings, other adults.
- Consider warm and positive art, photos

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 **3. Start talking but quickly shift into listening**

- Choose a calm time – or make one. Go out for ice cream, a walk. **DO NOT RUSH.**
- If they initiate and you are fired, do **ALL YOU CAN** to suck it up but if you can't, make a date right then and there and promise to keep it. Do a mini-preview. Especially important with teenagers who are on different sleep cycles than us. If thoughts of self-harm, **YOU CANNOT PUT IT OFF.**
- Using open ended questions, initiate conversation.
- Express your concerns gently with love and support.
- I've noticed that.....
- What's up?


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 **4. Listen Actively**

Active listening

A communication skill that involves going beyond simply hearing the words someone speaks. It is about actively processing and seeking to understand.

- Paraphrase – check your understanding by summarizing the speakers words in your own words
- Invite clarification – "What might be an example of that?" "Help me understand." "I'm not familiar with that."
- Reflect feelings – "It sounds frustrating; might mirror what you are sensing from the speaker's body language and intensity.
- Label and normalize the feeling.
 - It sounds like you are feeling _____, and that makes sense
 - Feeling _____ makes sense.
 - _____ (Big Feelings are) like a wave on the ocean – it builds then peaks, then recedes. Just this time it's a long wave....

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 **5. Educate yourself**


- Learn about mental health issues, symptoms, and treatment options.
- Ask about what runs in the family.

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 **6. Promote healthier habits**

- Slow down and simplify
- Earlier bedtime? Consistent bedtime on weekends?
- Rearrange so less morning chaos?
- Clean and consistent nutrition
- Exercise
- Time outside
- Hydrate
- Turn off tv/internet entirely or for doses
- Sit down family meals a couple times a week
- Model time outs/cool down time

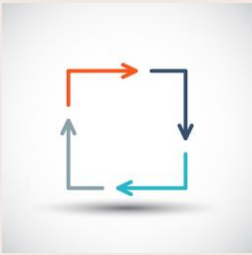
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 **7. Mindfulness and Positive Self-Talk**

- Practice mindfulness throughout the day
 - Being fully present in the here-and-now; awareness of self in the present moment.
 - Take many mindful minutes; not just one, 20-min meditation. Eat mindfully. Work mindfully. Sprinkle mini-meditations in throughout the day.
- Use spiritual resources.
- Try box breathing (in 4 -hold 4 -out 4 -hold 4)
 - Next slide – let's do it.
- Practice positive self-talk and affirmations

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For Special Needs



Box Breathing

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For Special Needs

<https://www.purewow.com/family/affirmations-for-kids>

1. I have many talents.
2. I don't have to be perfect to be worthy.
3. Making mistakes helps me grow.
4. I am good at solving problems.
5. I'm not afraid of a challenge.
6. I am smart.
7. I am capable.
8. I am a good friend.
9. I am loved for who I am.
10. I remember that bad feelings come and go.
11. I'm proud of myself.

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For Special Needs

8. Maintain (or develop) routines

- Structure and routine provide stability and decrease anxiety
- Be consistent with when and where
- Meals, sleep, homework, hobbies, relaxation
- Increase adult presence/supervision

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9. Put your oxygen mask on first before assisting others....



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Control what YOU can, adults.

- Practice mindfulness
- Find and stick with routines that bring your comfort
- Examine your expectations
- Self-care and breaks/respice. Meet physical needs.
 - Protect rest, exercise, and diet; careful with alcohol/toxins
- Simplify your life/prioritize
- Know thyself – fears, expectations, triggers
- Rely on your spiritual supports
- Check your assumptions
- Get outside

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10. Get help

- For yourself and for your child
- Talk to your pediatrician or school personnel
- Psychologist – talk therapy, assessment
- Psychologist – medical doctor so can prescribe
- Rely on your faith and supports. Do not bear this alone.

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****Chemicals****

- Changes in Behavior:** Sudden mood swings, irritability, or drastic changes in personality.
- Isolation:** Withdrawal from family and friends, preferring to spend time alone or with a new group of friends.
- Decline in Academic Performance:** A drop in grades, lack of interest in school, or frequent absences.
- Neglecting Responsibilities:** Ignoring chores, homework, or other commitments, and showing a lack of motivation.
- Physical Changes:** Noticeable weight loss or gain, poor personal hygiene, or bloodshot eyes.
- Secretive Behavior:** Being evasive about their activities or whereabouts, or becoming defensive when questioned. Stories are fantastic.
- Increased Risk-Taking:** Engaging in dangerous behaviors, such as reckless driving, skipping school, or experimenting with substances.
- Financial Issues:** Borrowing money frequently or having unexplained expenses, which may indicate spending on substances. Selling their things.
- Changes in Sleep Patterns:** Insomnia, excessive sleeping, or other sleep disturbances.
- Physical Complaints:** Frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches, or other unexplained physical symptoms.

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Chemicals

- Stay Calm and Observant:** Take note of specific behaviors and changes that concern you. Keeping a record can help you identify patterns and provide details if needed.
- Educate Yourself:** Learn about substance use and dependence, including signs, symptoms, and potential consequences. This knowledge will help you approach the situation more effectively.
- Choose the Right Time to Talk:** Find a private, calm moment to discuss your concerns with your child. Avoid confrontational or accusatory language, and express your love and concern.
- Listen Actively:** Give your child a chance to share their feelings and experiences. Listen without judgment, and validate their emotions to foster open communication.
- Express Your Concerns:** Clearly but gently explain why you are worried. Use specific examples of behaviors that have raised your concerns.
- Encourage Professional Help:** Suggest seeking help from a mental health professional or substance use counselor. Offer to help them find resources or accompany them to appointments if they're open to it.
- Set Clear Boundaries:** If substance use is confirmed, it's important to establish clear rules and consequences regarding substance use and behavior in the home. TEST THEM
- Be Supportive:** Reinforce that recovery is a process and that you are there to support them. Encourage healthy coping strategies and activities.
- Consider Family Support:** Look into family therapy or support groups for families dealing with substance use issues, such as Al-Anon or Nar-Anon.
- Take Care of Yourself:** Supporting a child with potential chemical dependence can be emotionally taxing. Make sure to seek support for yourself as well.

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