

# Children/Adolescent Mental Health



Mental health problems causes severe disturbances in thinking, feeling, and/or relating. The result leads to difficulties in coping with the ordinary demands of life. Just like adults, children and adolescents can have mental health problems that interfere with the way they think, feel and act. Mental health problems for children and adolescents include depression, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, and conduct disorders among others. When left untreated, these mental health problems can lead to school failure, family conflicts, substance abuse, violence, and even suicide.

## Did you know?

- One in five children and adolescents have a mental health problem. One in ten, or about 6 million have a serious emotional disturbance
- Three-fourths of people with mental health problems had symptoms before age 24 and half of them showed signs of trouble by age 14
- 21% of youth between the ages of nine and 17 have a diagnosis of a mental health problem. Between 10 and 15% have some symptoms of depression. For youth between nine and 17, 5% have a full fledged diagnosis of major depression.
- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health problem among children, affecting 13% of children between the ages of 9 and 17
- Seven percent of youth between 5–17 (3.4 million) have Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity. Boys are two to three times more likely to suffer ADHD than girls.
- Only one out of two people with a serious mental health problem seek treatment.
- Two-thirds of youth with mental health problems do not get help
- 20–40% of depressed children relapse in two years. 70% will relapse in adulthood
- 20–40% of adolescents with depression eventually develop bipolar disorder
- 66% of boys and almost 75% of girls in juvenile detention have at least one mental health problem

## Warning Signs

The causes of mental health problems in children and adolescents are varied. Some are caused by chemical imbalances in the brain, by a head injury or by an emotional trauma. Some mental health problems are believed to run in families, suggesting that heredity may play a role. Mental health problems are not a sign of weakness. They cannot be willed away and children and adolescents can't "outgrow" them. If left untreated symptoms can become serious.

Parents and school personnel are most likely to notice signs of a mental health or emotional problem.

Warning signs include:

- Poor school performance
- Worries or anxieties
- An inability to cope with day-to-day problems
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Aggressive behavior towards self or others
- Feeling really sad and hopeless without good reason
- Being angry or irritable most of the time
- Loss of interest in activities
- Constant concern about physical problems or appearance
- Isolates self from friends and family
- Feels worthless or guilty a lot of the time
- Feels life is too hard to handle or talks of suicide
- Daydreams too much and can't get things done
- Hears unexplained voices

## Depression

One of the most common mental health problems in children is depression. All children get sad at times, but for those with depression the feelings can come often and get in the way of normal life. There are three main types of depression:

- Major depression is a depressed mood that lasts most of the day, nearly every day for at least two weeks or longer.
- Dysthymia is a milder but more constant form of depression that lasts for two years or longer.
- Bipolar depression (formerly called manic depression) involves mood swings between depression and mania that can last a lifetime.

## Symptoms of Depression

- Sad or depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day
- Often feel irritable and tearful
- Loss of pleasure or interest in previously enjoyable activities
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness or guilt
- Feel restless and tired most of the time
- Inability to concentrate

## Symptoms of Mania

- Decreased need for sleep
- Racing thoughts, easily distracted
- More rebellious or irritable
- Talks more often and very rapidly.
- Takes risks (can include driving recklessly, trying drugs/alcohol, gambling)
- Increased energy
- Unrealistic sense of self-esteem outside the person's skill level

## Anxiety

Anxiety is another common mental health problem in children and adolescents. Anxiety is a feeling of uneasiness, nervousness, fear or worry brought on by real or perceived threats to our safety or well being. It often involves a physical reaction as well. There are several types of anxiety disorders:

• **Separation Anxiety Disorder** is diagnosed when children develop intense anxiety as a result of being separated from a parent or loved one. This anxiety is so intense that it interferes with the child's normal activities. Symptoms may include: refusal to leave the house alone, cling to parents or follow closely on their heels, complaints of headaches, stomachaches, etc. heart palpitations, dizziness, feeling faint, trouble falling asleep and wanting to sleep in parent's bed, refusal to attend school, when separated from a parent they become preoccupied with fears that harm will come to them or they will never see their parents again.

• **Panic Disorder** includes a period of apprehension or fear in which a person feels some or all of the following symptoms during each attack: 1) palpitations, pounding heart, or rapid heart rate, 2) sweating, 3) trembling or shaking, 4) sensations of shortness of breath or feeling smothered, 5) feeling choked, 6) chest pain or discomfort, 7) nausea or abdominal distress, 8) feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded, or faint 9) feelings of unreality, 10) fear of losing control or going crazy, 11) fear of dying, 12) feeling tingling sensations or numbness, 13) chills or hot flashes.

• **Simple Phobia** is a persistent or irrational fear of or avoiding a particular object or situation. Phobic objects can include animals, and phobic situations frequently involved fear of heights or closed spaces.

• **Generalized Anxiety Disorder** is a persistent anxiety resulting in symptoms of: 1) shakiness, jitteriness, jumpiness, trembling, tension, muscle aches, fatigue, inability to relax, or eyelid twitches, 2) sweating, heart pounding or racing), 3) excessive anxiety, fear or worry, and 4) vigilance and scanning resulting in distractibility and difficulty concentrating.

• **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder** may be characterized by either obsessions or compulsions. Obsessions are recurrent, persistent ideas, thoughts, images or impulses that are seen as intrusive and inappropriate and that cause anxiety and distress.

Compulsions are repetitive and seemingly purposeful behaviors that are performed according to certain rules or in a certain way. These behaviors are aimed at preventing or reducing distress or preventing some dreaded situation or event.

## Conduct Disorder

Conduct disorders are the largest group of mental health problems in adolescents. Because the symptoms are closely tied to socially unacceptable, violent or criminal behavior, many people confuse this illness with either juvenile delinquency or the difficulty of teen years.

Children show at least three of the following behaviors over six months may have a conduct disorder:

- Stealing and/or vandalism
- Consistent lies
- Deliberately setting fires
- Frequency absences from school
- Cruelty to animals and/or humans
- Starting fights/use of a weapon in a fight

The cause of conduct disorders is unknown, but it is thought to be the result of one of more of the following:

- A defense against anxiety
- Lack of attachment to a caregiver in the early years
- Failure to adapt to rules for acceptable behavior
- An attempt to cope with a hostile environment
- To gain social status among friends
- Heredity (criminal or antisocial parents tend to have the same problems)
- Male hormones (many more boys than girls develop the disorder)
- A problem with the central nervous system

## Getting Help

A mental health problem can significantly impact the daily life and future of a young person. If you are concerned about a child, don't ignore warning signs.

Children are best served by early intervention, which can prevent them from being placed in more costly forms of treatment.

First, seek an evaluation for your child. Many people start by talking with the child's primary care physician or school counselor. They may refer you to a mental health professional in your area. Once you have determined the presence of a mental health problem you will be asked to participate in the development of a treatment plan. The treatment may include counseling (individual, group and family), case management, educational and psychiatric services. In most cases, treatment can be given on an outpatient basis and usually includes counseling for the parents and other family members as well.

In Kansas City there is a network of mental health facilities that can help with these problems. The Community Mental Health Centers listed on the front of this flier provide treatment, referrals and support.

For more information, visit our website at [www.mental-healthkc.org](http://www.mental-healthkc.org)

## Resources

### Treatment and Information Community Mental Health Centers

#### MISSOURI

**Comprehensive Mental Health Services, Inc.**  
10901 Winner Road  
Independence, MO 64052  
816-254-3652  
[www.thecmhs.com](http://www.thecmhs.com)

#### ReDiscover

901 NE Independence  
Lee's Summit, MO 64086  
816-246-8000

#### TMC Behavioral Health

300 W. 19th Terrace  
Kansas City, MO 64108  
816-467-1400  
[www.trumed.org](http://www.trumed.org)

#### Swope Health Services

3801 Blue Parkway  
Kansas City, MO 64130  
816-923-5800  
[www.swopeparkway.org](http://www.swopeparkway.org)

#### Tri County Mental Health Services

3100 NE 83rd Street  
Kansas City, MO 64119  
816-468-0400

#### KANSAS

**Johnson County Mental Health Center**  
6000 Lamar, Suite 130  
Mission, KS 66202  
913-831-2550  
<http://mentalhealth.jocogov.org>

#### Wyandot Centers

3615 Eaton Street  
Kansas City, KS 66103  
913-831-9500  
[www.kumc.edu/wmhc](http://www.kumc.edu/wmhc)

#### Mental Health America of the Heartland

739 Minnesota Ave.  
Kansas City, KS 66101  
913-281-2221  
HelpLine 913-281-1234