

**Meeting the
Mental Health
Needs of
Children and
Adolescents**

Counseling 448: Intervention and
Advocacy for Children
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**Childrens' and Adolescents'
Mental Health**

"Mental health is how we think, feel, and act as we face life's situations. It is how we look at ourselves, our lives, and the people in our lives. It is how we evaluate options and make choices. Mental health includes how we handle stress, relate to others, and make decisions."

- American Psychiatric Association

**There is widespread denial that mental
health concerns affect children**

- 4 million youth suffer from a major mental illness that results in significant impairments at home, at school, and with peers. [U.S. Surgeon General's Report, 1999]
- One in ten children and adolescents has a mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment. Yet, only about one in five of them receives mental health services in any given year. [U.S. Surgeon General's Conference on Children's Mental Health, 2000]
- Among children ages 9-17, there are one or two with serious emotional problems in virtually every classroom in the country. [President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2002]

**Some of the most commonly known
Psychiatric Disorders...
Mental Health Problems for
Children**

- Anxiety Disorders
- Major Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
- Learning Disorders
- Conduct Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Autism
- Schizophrenia
- Asperger's Disorder

**ADVOCATING FOR
CHILDREN**

- School Problems
- Frequent fighting
- Trouble Sleeping
- Feeling sad
- Thoughts about suicide or running away
- Stealing or lying
- Mood swings
- Anxiety
- Setting fires
- Obsessive thoughts
- Excessive weight loss or gain
- Disturbing thoughts
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Killing animals
- Self destructive behavior

**Mental Health Problems for
Children and Adolescents**

- Phobia - unrealistic and overwhelming fear of some object or situation
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder - a pattern of excessive, unrealistic worry not attributable to any recent experience
- Panic Disorder - Terrifying panic attacks with physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat

The Anxious Child

- Constant thoughts and fears about safety of self and parents
- Refusing to go to school
- Frequent stomach aches and other physical complaints
- Extreme worries about sleeping away from home
- Overly clingy behavior at home
- Panic or tantrums at times of separation from parents

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder - being trapped in a pattern of repeated thoughts and behaviors
- Post-traumatic stress disorder - a pattern of flashbacks and other symptoms from experiencing psychological distressing events such as physical or sexual abuse, witnessing death or violence, bombing or hurricane
- Separation anxiety - intense anxiety to the point of panic as a result of being separated from a love one

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Miss school or don't finish school
- Impaired relations with peers
- Low self esteem
- Alcohol or other drug use
- Problems adjusting to work situation

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Experience extreme, unrealistic worry
- Very self-conscious
- Feel tense
- Strong need for reassurance
- Somatic complaints

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

Studies show that up to 6 out of every 100 children may have depression. The disorder is marked by changes in:

- emotion - the child feels sad, cries, looks tearful, feels worthless;
- motivation - schoolwork declines, the child shows no interest in play;

The Depressed Child

- Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying
- Hopelessness
- Inability to enjoy previously favorite activities
- Persistent boredom; low energy
- Social isolation, poor communication

The Depressed Child

- Low self-esteem and guilt
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability, anger and hostility
- Major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Physical well-being - there may be changes in appetite or sleep patterns and vague physical complaints; and
- Thoughts - the child believes that he or she is ugly, that he or she is unable to do anything right, or that the world or life is hopeless

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Bipolar disorder - is marked by exaggerated mood swings between extreme lows (depression) and highs (excitedness or manic phases). The child may talk nonstop, need very little sleep, and show unusually poor judgment.

Bipolar Disorder

- The manic symptoms include:
- Severe changes in mood-either unusually happy or silly, or very irritable, angry or aggressive Unrealistic highs in self esteem
- Great increase in energy with no sleep for days without feeling tired
- Talks too much, too fast, changes topic quickly and can't be interrupted
- High risk behavior-alcohol, drugs, reckless driving, or sexual promiscuity

Bipolar Disorder

- Depressive symptoms include:
- irritability, depressed mood, persistent sadness, frequent crying
 - thoughts of death or suicide
 - loss of enjoyment in favorite activities
 - low energy level, fatigue, poor concentration, complaints of boredom
 - major change in eating or sleeping patterns

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- ADHD: Affects three to 10 percent of all children in America; ten times more common in boys than girls; most often diagnosed when the child is between ages eight and 10. The child:
- has difficulty finishing any activity that requires concentration at home, school, or play; shifts from one activity to another;
 - doesn't seem to listen to anything said to him or her

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Acts before thinking, is excessively active and runs or climbs nearly all the time, often is very restless even during sleep;
- Requires close and constant supervision, frequently calls out in class, and has serious difficulty waiting his or her turn in games or groups

A Child Presenting ADHD Symptoms

- A child with ADHD may have other psychiatric disorders such as conduct disorder, anxiety disorder, depressive disorder, or manic-depressive disorder.
- Treatment approaches may include cognitive-behavioral therapy, social skills training, parent education, and modifications to the child's educational program.

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Conduct disorders occur in nine percent of boys and two percent of girls under the age of 18. Symptoms are socially unacceptable, violent or criminal behavior such as:
- Steals without confrontation such as forgery
- Uses physical force as in muggings, armed robbery, purse-snatching or extortion Deliberately sets fires

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

Conduct Disordered Children and Adolescents

- Is often truant from school
- Has broken into someone's home, office, or car
- Deliberately destroys the property of others
- Has been physically cruel to animals and/or humans
- Has forced someone into sexual activity with him or her
- Has used a weapon in more than one fight

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

Aggression toward people and animals

- bullies, threatens or intimidates others
- is physically cruel to people and animals
- forces someone into sexual activity
- Destruction of Property
- Deliberately engaged in fire setting
- Deceitfulness, lying, or stealing
- Serious violation of rules: runs away, stays out all night, truant from school

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Many children with conduct disorder may have coexisting condition such as mood disorders, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse, ADHD, learning problems or thought disorders.

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Autism is the most severe of psychiatric disorders that appears within the first 3 years of life.
- Autistic children:
 - Don't cuddle and may stiffen and resist affection
 - Fail to develop normal relationships with anyone - not even their parents
 - Exhibit very repetitive behaviors (e.g., rocking, head banging)

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Asperger's disorder is a pervasive developmental disorder characterized by problems in the development of social skills, have difficulty interacting with peers, and may display eccentric behaviors like spend hours each day preoccupied with counting cars or watching only the weather channel on television

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Anorexia Nervosa - cannot be persuaded to maintain a minimal normal weight
- Bulimia Nervosa - compelled to binge (eat huge amounts of food at a time) and purge to prevent weight gain by vomiting, abusing laxatives, or exercising obsessively.

Mental Health Problems for Children and Adolescents

- Young people with schizophrenia can have a devastating mental disorder characterized by psychotic periods when they may experience hallucinations, withdraw from others, and lose contact with reality.

The Causes of Mental Health Problems are Complicated

Biological Causes

- Genetics
- Chemical imbalances in the body
- Damage to the central nervous system
- Fetal alcohol syndrome
- Mental retardation

The Causes of Mental Health Problems are Complicated

Environmental:

- exposure to environmental toxins (e.g., lead);
- exposure to violence (abuse, victim, disasters);
- stress related to chronic poverty, discrimination or other hardships;
- loss of primary care giver through death, divorce, or broken relationships

Some Warning Signs: Pay Attention if a Child or Adolescent

- Really sad and hopeless without good reason;
- Very angry most of the time, cries or overreacts to things;
- Worthless or guilty;
- Anxious or worried more than other young people
- Unable to get over a loss or death of someone important

Some Warning Signs: Pay Attention if a Child or Adolescent

- Extremely fearful - has unexplained fear or more fears than most children;
- Constantly concerned about physical problems or physical appearance; Frightened that his or her mind is controlled or is out of control

Some Warning Signs: Experiences Big Changes...

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

Some Warning Signs

- poor concentration; can't think clearly or make up his or her mind;
- inability to sit still or focus attention;
- worry about being harmed, hurting others, or about doing something "bad;" needs to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines in excess in order to avoid danger
- thoughts that race - almost too fast to follow;
- persistent nightmares

Some Warning Signs: Behaves in Ways That Cause Problems...+-

- uses alcohol or other drugs;
- eats large amounts of foods then purges using laxatives, etc.;
- continues to diet and/or exercise obsessively although bone-thin;
- constantly violates the rights of others or breaks the law without regard for others; does things that can be life threatening

Meeting Mental Health Needs...

- case management
- community-based in patient psychiatric care
- counseling
- crisis residential care
- crisis outreach teams
- day treatment

Meeting Mental Health Needs...

- special education services
- family support
- intensive family-based counseling (in the home)
- psychiatric consultation
- self-help or support groups
- therapeutic foster care
- protection and advocacy

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

- Twenty percent of all children from birth through 17 years of age suffer from a diagnosable mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder, and nine percent - 13 percent of all youth ages nine to 17 - have a serious emotional disturbance (SED)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

- Every child's mental health is important.
- Many children have mental health problems.
- These problems are real and painful and can be severe. Mental health problems can be recognized and treated. Caring families and communities working together can help.
