

## **YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH**

Although youth are generally considered a healthy age group on a global level, it is estimated that approximately 20% of youth, or well over one billion youth, experience a mental-health condition each year. In fact, young people are at the greatest risk of a range of mental-health issues during their transition from childhood to adulthood due, in large part, to the host of physical, psychological and emotional changes which occur during this vulnerable period.

Only recently have mental health issues attracted global attention. Mental conditions, which include behavioral and mental-health problems such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, aggressive-disruptive behavior, attention-deficit and hyperactivity problems, and post-traumatic stress disorder, are the leading causes of adjustment problems in adolescents and young people. They contribute heavily to disability and lost productivity across the life course.

Mental-health conditions affect youths' self-esteem, social interactions, and their chances of personal injury and harming themselves and others. Youth with untreated mental-health conditions struggle to succeed in school. Academic problems include low engagement, poor academic performance, learning disabilities, discipline problems that can lead to suspension, poor attendance and, eventually, school dropout.

As they near and enter adulthood, youth with mental-health conditions face poor transition outcomes, especially into the work force. Integration into society, including the workplace, is key to their successful transition to a working life.

## **WARNING SIGNS PARENTS CAN LOOK FOR**

- Marked fall in school performance
- Poor grades in school despite trying very hard
- Severe worry or anxiety
- Frequent physical complaints
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Difficulties in concentrating
- Sexual acting out
- Depression, prolonged negative mood/attitude
- Worries/anxieties that interfere with school and daily life
- Alcohol/drug use

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- Be positive role models. Children need to see parents express feelings, talk over a problem, or see things from someone else's point of view.
- Promote a healthy lifestyle. Provide healthy food, make sure your child gets plenty of sleep and exercise.
- Talk about the day. Focus on the positive and the efforts made.
- If something is bothering or stressing your child, ask if help is needed to resolve a problem.
- Ask how your child is feeling. Some children do not know how to express their feelings. Help them with language to "name" and express their feelings.
- Teach children how to reach out to others.
- Always take children's concerns and worries seriously. Children and youth may believe that their feelings don't matter if we dismiss their feelings.
- Spend regular positive time with them to build a good and trusting relationship.
- Help them face stress and cope with it in a positive way.
- Have appropriate expectations, limits, and consequences for behavior.

The widespread stigma attached to mental-health conditions jeopardizes the situation for youth with mental-health concerns. Changing the public perception of mental-health conditions is essential to addressing stigma at both a personal and a societal level and creating the opportunity for, and acceptance of, accessing services.

Colorado Crisis Services provides 24/7/365 confidential and immediate support from a trained crisis counselor who engages in immediate problem solving for mental health issues (1-844-493-TALK (8255). Translation services are available for non-English speakers. This service also has walk-in centers open 24/7 at which confidential, in-person crisis support is available (see website below for locations).

### REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT, & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Mental Health First Aid (<http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/take-a-course-types/youth>)
- Colorado Crisis Services (<http://coloradocrisisservices.org/>)
- Mental Health Matters: Social Inclusion of Youth With Mental Health Conditions (<http://undesadspd.org/Youth.aspx>)
- U.S. Government Mental Health Web site (FindYouthInfo.gov)
- Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) (<http://www.cheo.on.ca>)
- Mental Health Matters – United Nations Report (<http://understadspd.org/Youth.aspx>)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (<http://www.nami.org>)  
NAMI – Military Kids  
(<http://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/April.2015Military-Kids-serve-too>)



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