

Your Child's Mental Health: What Every Family Should Know



If you are reading these words, you are probably an adult who cares deeply about the life and health of a child. Sometimes it becomes difficult to know the best way to love and guide your child. You may notice behaviors in your child that puzzle, annoy, or even frighten you. Some of these are the normal stages of growth and development. If you want to learn more about your child's mental health, keep reading.

What Is Mental Health?

Mental health is how we think, feel, and act in order to face life's situations. It is how we look at ourselves, our lives, and the people we know and care about. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, evaluate our options, and make

choices. Like physical health, mental health is important at every stage of life. Everyone has mental health.

Mental Health Problems

It's easy for parents to recognize when a child has a high fever. A child's mental health problem may be more difficult to identify. Mental health problems can't always be seen. But the symptoms can be recognized.

Mental health problems can be diagnosed because mental health professionals have studied and documented the symptoms. Some of these problems are depression, anxiety, conduct, eating, and attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorders.

Mental health problems affect one in every five young people at any given time.

Tragically, an estimated two-thirds of all young people with mental health problems are not getting the help they need.

Many children and adolescents have periods of emotional stress that would benefit from short-term treatment, but those problems would not necessarily result in what is called a "diagnosable" mental health problem. Examples of these mental health problems may include grieving the recent loss of a loved one or improving family relationships.

A child's mental health has no relationship to his or her intellectual capacity.

Children with and without the above mental health problems have IQ's that range from low (mental retardation) to high.

Special education is one of the support services schools provide to help meet the unique needs of children and adolescents who have many types of mental health problems as well as the needs of children who have physical health problems. Not everyone in special education has a mental health problem, and not every child or adolescent with a mental health problem is receiving special education.

Serious Emotional Disturbances

The phrase, serious emotional disturbances for children and adolescents, refers to mental health problems that are severely disrupting daily life and functioning at home, at school, or in the community. Serious emotional disturbances affect 1 in every 10 young people at any given time.

Without help, such mental health problems can lead to school failure, alcohol or other drug abuse, family discord, violence, or even suicide.

The Causes

We don't know all the causes of mental health problems in young people. We do know that both environment and biology can be involved. Examples of biological causes are genetics, chemical imbalances, and damage to the central nervous system. The medical profession refers to these as neurobiological brain disorders.

Many environmental factors can put children at risk. For example, children who are exposed to violence, abuse, neglect, lead poisoning, or loss of loved ones through death, divorce, or broken relationships are more at risk for mental health problems. Other risk factors include rejection because of race, sexual orientation, religion, or poverty.

Don't Give Up

It's important that you keep looking until you find the right services for your child. Some children and families need counseling or family supports. Others may need medical care, residential care, day treatment, education services, legal assistance, rights protection, transportation, or case management.

Some families don't seek help because they are afraid of what other people may say or think. Other barriers also may get in the way, such as the cost of care, limited insurance benefits, or no health insurance. While these may be problems for your family, treatment is necessary. Some mental health providers and community mental health centers charge fees on a sliding-scale based on a family's ability to pay.

Seeking help may require a lot of patience and persistence on your part. Be assured that there are several national organizations and advocacy groups that can help you find services in your community.

Help Is Available

The National Mental Health Information Center has information that can help you find the services your family may need. It is a new resource of the Center for Mental Health Services. The Information Center has trained specialists that can give you useful information about service providers, organizations, and other local and national resources that can help you. It's confidential, and it's free.

Information

Call toll-free: 1.800.789.2647

Other Ways

FAX: 240.221.4295

1.866.889.2647

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/>