

Collaborations Between School and Home: Mental Health Diagnoses

How Common Are Mental Health Diagnoses in Youth?

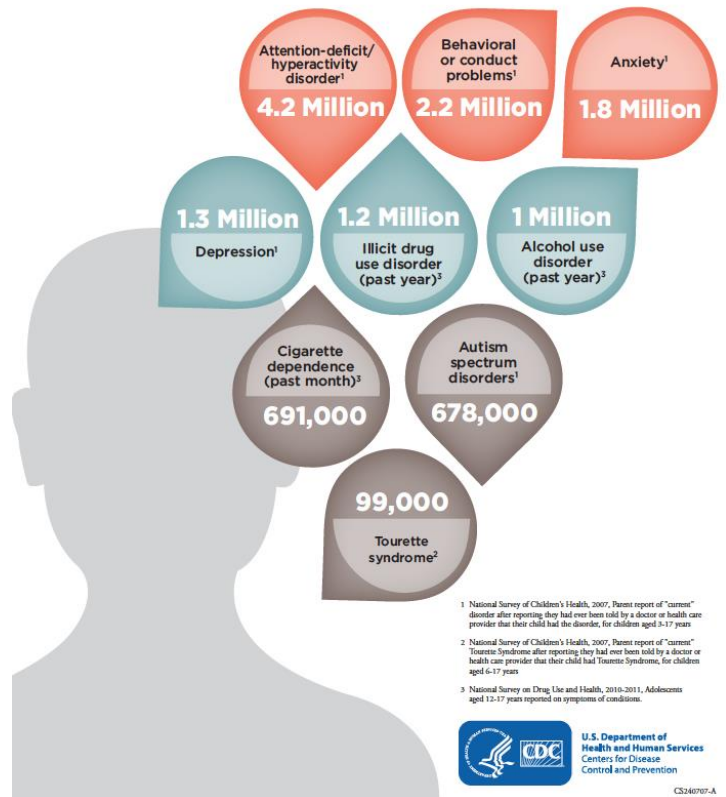
The United States Department of Health and Human Services (1999) reports that over four million children and adolescents in the US suffer from a serious mental disorder that causes significant impairments at home, school, and with their peers. This equates to 1 in 5 youth. Approximately half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and three quarters by age 24.

Signs and Symptoms

As youth enter puberty, drastic changes are happening physically, emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively. While many of the following signs and symptoms are “normal” during this time, sudden changes, multiple symptoms, those lasting two weeks or longer, and those significantly impacting daily routines should be looked into more carefully. Areas to watch for include:

- Frequent irritability with sudden bursts of anger
- More sensitive to criticism
- Not enjoying activities they usually like
- Feeling tired for much of the day
- A change in eating habit
- A hard time concentrating
- Drop in school grades or attendance
- Pulling away from family and friends

ESTIMATES OF U.S. CHILDREN with Mental Disorders



- Changes in energy level
 - Obsessive or compulsive behaviors
 - Loss of interest in personal appearance
 - Frequent self-criticism or self-blame
 - Unrealistic or excessive anxiety or guilt
 - Suspiciousness
 - Talking rapidly
 - Thoughts of suicide or death*
- *Seek immediate intervention from a health/mental health provider

Getting the RIGHT information and help:

Although both parents and educators may have experience and understanding in various mental health disorders, it is important for a mental health professional to properly assess and diagnose in order to identify the right treatment, which may or may not include medication. Psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical counselors, and clinical social workers all have received specialized training and should be consulted as soon as a family thinks their child/adolescent may be experiencing symptoms related to mental health needs. A referral from a health care provider is often recommended in order to rule out any physical or medical issues that could be causing the symptoms.



Open Communication is Key

Adolescence is a time when youth are developing their own identities and independence from adults. It is not uncommon for pre-teens and teenagers to avoid their parents, hide how they are feeling, and want privacy. As a result, school officials are in a unique position in that they get to see and talk with students each and every day. They have the chance to observe and document behavior changes, class participation, and socialization patterns in order to share their concerns with families. Youth often are likely to open up to a trusted adult who is not a parent and often choose school staff as their confidants.

Behavioral and emotional changes occur in the home, school, and the community. Families should never be alone when trying to access help for their children and can always seek guidance or advice without embarrassment from a school staff or professional. Stigmas associated with mental health continue to prevent individuals from seeking assistance. In addition, parents may feel they are blamed for their children's behaviors and are reluctant to reach out. By working together as a team, parents and school staff can support each other while supporting the student. Sharing information of what helps and what hurts provides consistency between school and home. Furthermore, engaging community partners from local mental health agencies and supportive programs provides an additional layer of support and ideas for interventions.

Communicating with Families: Tips for School Professionals

Adapted from: Braiden, Bothwell, & Duffy, 2010; Helm, Miranda, & Angoff-Chedd, 1998; and American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, et. al. (2007)

1. Share concerns and test results with parents/guardians in person.
2. Provide observations and concrete examples. Avoid generalizations and labels.
3. Refrain from making judgments or assumptions about the parents' decisions regarding treatments or services.
4. Don't assume you know how the parent will react. Remember that denial and anger may exist; relief and validation may also exist.
5. Provide current and accessible information about the child's symptoms, diagnosis (if appropriate), or learning/emotional disabilities.
6. Provide information about local resources for the youth and information about parent training and support groups.
7. Recognize the parents'/guardians'/ feelings without displaying pity, shame, or blame.
8. Be willing to participate in problem solving and brainstorming.
9. Be open to ongoing communication and support.



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Learn More about Collaboration and Mental Health Diagnoses

National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI)

- <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions> - This website provides information on the symptoms, causes, treatments, diagnosis, and treatment of a variety of mental health diagnoses.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

- <http://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/index.html> - Includes information for families, educators, youth, and others on identifying, supporting, and discussing mental health concerns.

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA)

- <http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/take-a-course/course-types/youth/> - 8--hour training designed to teach family members, educators, and other youth-serving adults how to identify and help adolescents experiencing a mental health challenge.
- Interested in attending a YMHFA training in Ohio? Contact Kathy Oberlin at oberlink2@gmail.com

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Mother Helping With Homework Art Image Courtesy of David Castillo Dominici at FreeDigitalPhotos.net.

Strong Relationship. Mother and Daughter Image Courtesy of stock images at FreeDigitalPhotos.net.

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