

YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT'S UP DOC?

When your child has a high fever, you get medical advice. Most likely, your child soon will be back to his or her playful and rambunctious self.

Mental health problems can be more difficult to recognize. One in five children have a diagnosable mental, emotional, or behavioral problem that can lead to school failure, family discord, violence, or suicide. Help is available. However, two-thirds of children with mental health problems are not getting the help they need.

Mental health is how we think, feel, and act. It's common for children to feel sad or behave badly from time to time. If you see troubling behaviors that seem persistent and severe, it's time to take action. These questions can help you:

1. Does your child seem angry most of the time? Cry a lot? Overreact to things?
2. Does he avoid friends or family? Want to be alone all the time? Seem to have a lost interest in things usually enjoyed?
3. Does your child destroy property, break the law or do things that are life threatening? Often hurt animals or other people? Seem to not care when you explain that this behavior is harmful? Use alcohol or drugs?
4. Is she extremely fearful? Having explained fears or worrying more than other young people?
5. Is your child limited by poor concentration? Suddenly having trouble making decisions? Grades showing a marked decline?
6. Is she obsessed about how she looks? Experiencing unexplained changes in sleeping or eating habits? Often complaining about headaches, stomachaches, or other physical problems?
7. Does your child feel that life is too hard to handle or talk about suicide? (sense of darkness or pessimism or talk about suicide)

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, talk to your doctor or pediatrician about your child's feelings and behavior. Discuss how your child may have been affected by recent major changes in your family. Together, you may decide that your child and family need help from someone with more mental health training.

Parents, teachers, and other care providers can work together to build on your family's strengths. All families have strengths.



U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration

For Information, contact SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center

P.O. Box 42557 • Washington, DC 20015 • 800-789-2647 • <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>

Maybe your family strengths are shared in a community function that you attend regularly. A family activity like cooking together may provide a time to experience both good communication and good food. Bond may be strengthened and skills developed in the ways you encourage your child's interest in activities like baseball, science, or being a helpful neighbor. Building on your family's strengths can provide the support your child needs to succeed.

Several national organizations and their local affiliates can help you find services in your community. The federal Center for Mental Health Services, a component of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, has the names and numbers of many of these organizations as well as a family brochure and other free materials about children's health. For more information, call 1-800-789-CMHS (2647), or visit the web site at www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/child/.

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