

# For Parents Concerned about Their Child's Mental Health



## Know the Warning Signs

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Common signs of mental illness in adults and **adolescents** can include the following:

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable “highs” or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality (“lack of insight” or anosognosia)
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs

- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing “aches and pains”)
- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance

Mental health conditions can also begin to develop in **young children**. Because they're still learning how to identify and talk about thoughts and emotions, their most obvious symptoms are behavioral. Symptoms in children may include the following:

- Changes in school performance
- Excessive worry or anxiety, for instance fighting to avoid bed or school
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

## How to Talk About Mental Health

US Department of Health & Human Services

Do you need help starting a conversation with your child about mental health? Try leading with these questions. Make sure you actively listen to your child's response.

- Can you tell me more about what is happening? How you are feeling?
- Have you had feelings like this in the past?
- Sometimes you need to talk to an adult about your feelings. I'm here to listen. How can I help you feel better?
- Do you feel like you want to talk to someone else about your problem?
- I'm worried about your safety. Can you tell me if you have thoughts about harming yourself or others?

When talking about mental health problems with your child you should:

- Communicate in a straightforward manner
- Speak at a level that is appropriate to a child or adolescent's age and development level (preschool children need fewer details than teenagers)
- Discuss the topic when your child feels safe and comfortable
- Watch for reactions during the discussion and slow down or back up if your child becomes confused or looks upset
- Listen openly and let your child tell you about his or her feelings and worries

If you are concerned your child's behaviors, it is important to get appropriate care. You should:

- Talk to your child's doctor, school nurse, or another health care provider and seek further information about the behaviors or symptoms that worry you
- Ask your child's primary care physician if your child needs further evaluation by a specialist with experience in child behavioral problems
- Ask if your child's specialist is experienced in treating the problems you are observing
- Talk to your medical provider about any medication and treatment plans

# Who to Talk To

## **SAMHSA's National Helpline**

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357), (also known as the Treatment Referral Routing Service) or TTY: 1-800-487-4889 is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free publications and other information.

## **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

1-800-273-8255

Whether you are personally in crisis or you are concerned about someone who is, you can ALWAYS call 1-800-273-TALK and get a listening ear, resources, and support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This hotline does not close on the weekend, holidays, or during bad weather.

Veterans, please press 1.

En español oprima el 2.

For hearing & speech impaired with TTY equipment 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)

## **Crisis Text Line**

Text HOME to 741741

The NAMI HelpLine is a free, nationwide peer-support service providing information, resource referrals and support to people living with a mental health conditions, their family members and caregivers, mental health providers and the public. HelpLine staff and volunteers are experienced, well-trained and able to provide guidance. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

## **Community Crisis Response and Intervention (CCRI)**

1-833-364-2274

CCRI will provide on-site emergency psychiatric screening and assessment to individuals experiencing mental health emergencies within 60 minutes of contact with the CCRI team. The service will be available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Sources: <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Know-the-Warning-Signs>; <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/parents-caregivers>