

## WHAT ARE MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS?

Mental health disorders are health conditions that affect a person's mood, behavior, and thoughts. Many mental health disorders can be effectively treated with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of both.

## QUICK FACTS

- 1 in every 5 children and youth has been diagnosed with a mental health disorder that greatly impacts their daily lives.
- Nearly 5 million children and youth in the US have a serious mental health disorder.
- Signs and symptoms vary by age and the type of disorder. Mental health disorders in children and youth can be difficult to diagnose because of the wide range of what is considered normal for behavior, abilities, and development.

## CAUSES OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The exact cause of mental health disorders is unknown. However, research suggests that they are the result of a combination of factors, including:

- Genetics.
- Biology.
- Trauma.
- Environmental stress.

Sometimes, mental health disorders can be brought on by major changes in a child's life, such as:

- Illness.
- Death or divorce of family members.
- A move to a new city or new school.
- The birth of a new sibling.

There are other times when a mental health disorder may appear without any cause.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- Extreme or unusual behavior for the age of the child, like being much more hyper, aggressive, or withdrawn.
- Sudden or hard-to-explain behavior changes, like a sudden drop in school performance.
- Behavioral problems in school or at home.
- Changes to sleep habits.
- Persistent nightmares.
- Excessive fear, worrying, or crying.
- Temper tantrums or acting out.
- Having trouble separating from a parent (on a regular basis).
- Loss of appetite or changes to appetite.
- Risk-taking behavior.

For over 25 years, our company has been

**RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE**

Call 910-862-6900 today to speak to  
someone who can help.

## MORE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Loss of appetite or changes to appetite.
- Risk-taking behavior.
- Difficulty concentrating or staying still.
- Loss of interest in friends or favorite activities.
- Sudden weight loss or gain.
- Excessive worry about weight gain.
- Extreme and prolonged sadness.
- Physical complaints with no apparent cause.
- Substance use.
- Seeing or hearing things that are not there.
- Destructive behavior, like damaging property or setting fires.
- Threatening to run away, or running away from home.
- Saying or writing that they want to harm themselves or others.

## WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Learn how to recognize the warning signs when someone is at risk for suicide, and what action steps you can take.

If you believe your child may be in danger of suicide or harming others:

- Call **911** (if danger for self-harm seems imminent).
- Call or text **988** to reach the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** and talk to a caring professional.
- Ask them if they are thinking about killing themselves. This will not put the idea into their head or make it more likely that they will attempt suicide.
- Listen without judging and show that you care.
- Stay with the child or youth, or make sure they are in a private, secure place with another caring person until you can get further help.
- Remove any objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.

Again, you can always call or text **988** to reach the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** and speak with a professional who can give you guidance.

## TAKE ACTION

If you have reason to believe that your child is experiencing symptoms of a mental health disorder and is not in immediate danger, the sooner you address the issue, the better the outcome.

- Reach out to your child's school counselor, pediatrician, or a mental health professional.
- Remember that early intervention is always best for your child's health and well-being.

Call 910-862-6900 today to speak to someone who can help.

This publication is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$1,000,000 with 0% financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by HRSA, HHS, or the US Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov).

Resources available upon request.