

Warning Signs and Finding Help

Excerpts taken from TeenMentalHealth.org, *School Mental Health Curriculum Guide*, Module 5, Seeking Help and Finding Support

Something is Not Quite Right: Getting Help Early for Mental Illness

Are you concerned that something is “not quite right” about the behavior of a student, a colleague or a member of your family? Are you worried about the seriousness of the problem and wondering if you need to seek a professional opinion?

Chances are that there is not a serious problem. However, if the problem is more serious, getting early help is essential if a mental illness is developing. The following checklists can assist you in determining what kind of help might be needed.

Checklist #1: Difficult behavior at home, at school or in the workplace

Behavior which is considered “normal”, although difficult:

People may be:

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| •rude | •argumentative | •withdrawn |
| •weepy | •over-sensitive | •rebellious |
| •thoughtless | •over-emotional | •shy |
| •irritable | •lazy | |

These behaviors may also occur as a normal reaction to stressful events, such as:

- breakup of a close relationship
- divorce
- other family crisis
- death of a loved one
- other personal crisis
- exam failure
- physical illness

Probably no cause for serious concern, but...

Try to be as supportive as possible, waiting for the “bad” behavior to pass. Should these behaviors persist, or if behavior is distressing or disruptive to others, you should seek professional counseling, help or advice. School counselors, social workers, mental health centers, family doctors or community centers can be of help.

Checklist #2: What's the difference between just having a bad day and something potentially more serious?

If an individual experiences many of the following feelings, he/she may have depression. This is treatable and it is important to seek help from a school counselor or social worker.

Signs of Clinical Depression:

- Feeling sad and miserable for most of the day
- Feeling like crying much of the time
- Not wanting to do anything, go anywhere, see anyone
- Having trouble concentrating or getting things done
- Feeling like one is operating in "slow motion"
- Having trouble sleeping
- Feeling tired and lacking energy – being unable to get out of bed even after a full night's sleep
- Having a change in appetite – usually a loss of appetite
- Feeling hopeless
- Thinking of suicide
- Always putting oneself down and thinking you're not good or that nothing really matters

Checklist #3: Behaviors that are cause for serious concern.

The following behaviors are much clearer signs that someone needs to be evaluated, especially if they have been present for several weeks, and should seek medical assessment as soon as possible. They may only be a minor disturbance, but a mental illness may be developing.

People may:

- Withdraw completely from family, friends and workmates
- Be afraid to leave the house (particularly during daylight hours)
- Sleep or eat poorly
- Sleep by day and stay awake at night, often pacing restlessly
- Be extremely occupied with a particular theme, for example, death, politics or religion
- Uncharacteristically neglect household or parental responsibilities, personal appearance or hygiene
- Deteriorate in performance at work or school
- Have difficulty concentrating, following conversation or remembering things
- Talk about or write things that do not really make sense

SUPPORT MATERIALS

- Panic, be extremely anxious, or significantly depressed and suicidal
- Lose variation in mood – be “flat” – lack emotional expression, humor, or friendliness
- Have marked changes in mood, from quiet to excited or agitated
- Hear voices that no one else can hear
- Believe, without reason, that others are plotting against, spying on, or following them. Can be extremely angry or afraid of these people.
- Believe that they are being harmed or asked to do things against their will, by, for instance, television, radio, aliens, God or the devil
- Believe they have special powers, for example, that they are important religious leaders, politicians or scientists
- Believe that their thoughts are being interfered with or that they can influence the thoughts of others
- Spend extravagant or unrealistic sums of money

For additional information: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/schoolmhl/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/final-teacher-knowledge-update.pdf>