

Knowing When to Get Treatment for Your Child



When to get treatment for your child or teen

Knowing when to get treatment for a mental health disorder is important for parents and families. Parents are often the first to suspect that their child or teen is challenged by feelings, behaviors, or environmental conditions that cause them to act disruptive, rebellious, or sad. This may include problems with:

- Relationships
- School
- Sleeping
- Eating
- Substance abuse
- Emotional expression
- Coping
- Attentiveness
- Responsiveness

It's also important to know that people of different ages will show different symptoms and behaviors. Getting to know the common inappropriate behaviors of younger children and those of older teens will often help to find any problems early when they can be treated more easily. It's important for families who suspect a problem in 1 or more of these areas to get treatment as soon as possible. Treatment for mental health disorders is available and can often help.

What are the symptoms of problems in a younger child?

These are the most common symptoms of problems in a younger child. These symptoms need a psychiatric evaluation. Symptoms may include:

- Significant decline in school performance or poor grades, even though the child studies and tries hard to succeed
- Little or no interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Less interest in friends or family
- Problems with sleep (for instance, night terrors, nightmares, insomnia, or sleeping too much)
- Hyperactivity
- Continuous or frequent aggression or acting out (for longer than 6 months)
- Continuous or frequent rebellion; opposition to authority and direction (for longer than 6 months)
- Refusal to go to school on a regular or frequent basis
- Excessive worry or anxiety
- Excessive, regular temper tantrums (without explanation)

- Thoughts or talk of suicide. Get help right away if your child has plans to hurt themselves or others. Call or text 988 or 800-273-8255 (800-273-TALK). You will be connected to trained mental health support at the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. An online chat choice is also available at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

These symptoms may look like other conditions. Always talk with your child's healthcare provider for a diagnosis.

What are the symptoms of problems in the older child or teen?

These are the most common symptoms of problems in an older child or teen. These symptoms need a psychiatric evaluation. But each teen may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include:

- Significant decline in school performance or poor grades even though the teen studies and tries hard to succeed
- Withdrawal or decreased interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Disinterest in spending time with friends or family
- Substance (alcohol and drugs) abuse
- Sleep disturbances (for instance, persistent night terrors, nightmares, insomnia, or sleeping too much)
- Depression (poor mood, negativity, or mood swings)
- Appetite changes, such as refusal to eat, excessive eating, food rituals, bingeing, or purging
- Continuous or frequent aggression or acting out (for longer than 6 months)
- Continuous or frequent rebellion; opposition to authority and direction (for longer than 6 months)
- Continuous or frequent anger (for longer than 6 months)
- Refusing to attend or skipping school
- Excessive worry or anxiety
- Self-injury
- Threats to self or others
- Thoughts of death
- Thoughts or talk of suicide
- Running away or threatening to run away
- Destructive behaviors, such as vandalism or other criminal activity
- Sexually acting out
- Lying or cheating
- Many physical complaints

These symptoms may look like other conditions. Always talk with your child's healthcare provider for a diagnosis.

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