

BOURNVITA X MINDS FOUNDATION

# CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

E-BOOK FOR PARENTS & CARETAKERS



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# Mental Health Issues in India

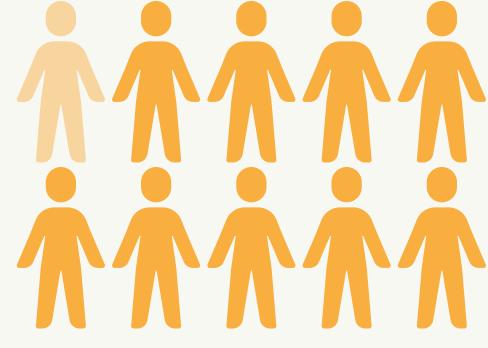
In order to understand the significance of mental health issues, let's look at the facts:



As of 2017, more than 14% of the Indian population have their mental health disorders

182 million

That is over 182 million people who struggle with their mental health



There is only 1 psychiatrist per 100,000 people in India, so many people remain undiagnosed



**From 2013-2020, 1.03 trillion USD was lost in economic productivity in India due to mental health conditions**

Suicide is the **3rd** leading cause of death among 15-19 year olds

**Over 50% of Indians with a mental health disorder have never been to a mental health professional**

50%

*"The accumulation of experiences a child receives shapes the outcomes and choices they will make as adults."*

- Dr Raghu Appasani, Psychiatrist and Founder/CEO of MINDS Foundation

Most common reasons Indians struggle to access mental healthcare:



Shame and fear



Stigma and discrimination



Lack of transportation



Financial means



Lack of awareness



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# Identifying a Child with Mental Health Issues

It can be difficult to recognize the symptoms of mental illness in children.

For many years, children's mental health has not been recognized, with many parents thinking their child's behaviour change is just because of mood swings, temper tantrums, or hormones.

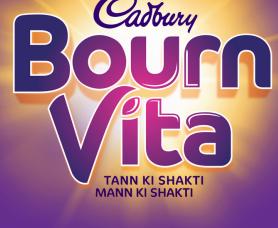
Today, we know that childhood is when most lifelong mental health issues surface. Therefore, our children need our support.



## Symptoms to look out for:



\*Please note: Some of these symptoms can be caused by other situational factors and are not a definite indicator that your child is struggling with their mental health.



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# Common Mental Health Symptoms

## Socialisation & getting along with peers



Childhood is a very important time to develop interpersonal skills and learn the acceptable behaviours and values of their community: their family and friends.

When children act in a way that is not typical or appropriate for the situations that they are in, it can be a sign that their mental health is suffering.

Here are a few signs that your child is struggling with socialisation:

1

### Not wanting to go to social events



2

### Fighting at school



3

### Poor confidence



4

### Having trouble getting along with peers



5

### Extreme nervousness before school/skipping school

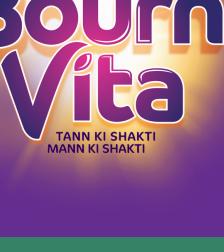


6

### Physical symptoms (stomach ache, headache)



Though it is true that children experience mood and behaviour changes that are completely normal, if you notice symptoms persisting for more than a few weeks, you should talk to your child and ask how they are doing. Let them know you are there for them, no matter what. You can also reach out to a professional or trusted community member. A good place to start is with your family doctor. They will be able to refer you to a child psychologist or other mental health professional.



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# Common Mental Health Symptoms

## Lack of concentration & fear of failing



Children face a large amount of pressure to succeed in school.

For some children, interpersonal conflict such as issues with peers or family members can affect their school experience.

For others, underlying disorders such as ADHD or anxiety can make attending school a difficult experience if not addressed appropriately.

1

### Decline in school performance



2

### Poor grades even with hard work



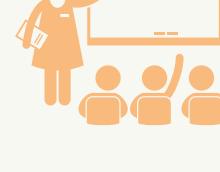
3

### Refusal to go to school or do homework



4

### Skipping school or class without your knowledge



5

### Extreme nervousness before school



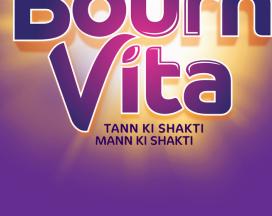
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### Losing interest in extracurricular activities



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them know you are there for them, no matter what. You can also reach out to a professional or trusted community member. A good place to start is with your family doctor. They will be able to refer you to a child psychologist or other mental health professional.



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# Common Mental Health Symptoms

## Lethargy & lack of interest



Childhood is a very important time to establish the baseline for an individual's mental health.

While we often think of mental health issues presenting as exaggerated emotions (deep sadness, etc), it is equally common for mental health issues to present as lack of emotion, low energy levels and reduced interest in everyday life.

Here are a few signs that your child may be struggling with their mental health:

1

### Feeling tired all the time



2

### Not interested in prior hobbies



3

### Lack of emotion, feeling indifferent



4

### Difficulty completing everyday tasks



5

### Trouble meeting goals/deadlines

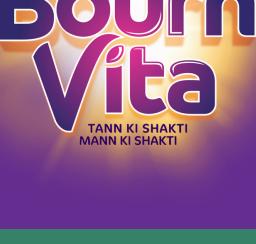


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### Decreased social involvement



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# Common Mental Health Symptoms

## Behavioural changes



All children can be challenging, naughty, or disobedient from time to time.

But sometimes children develop behaviours that can be very disruptive or dangerous, which needs to be addressed.

There are a few behaviour disorders that can occur in young children, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder.

1

### Emotionally reactive



2

### Rule-breaking behaviour



3

### Arguing or fighting with peers and adults frequently



4

### Use of drugs or alcohol



5

### Lack of focus



6

### Hyperactivity



Though it is true that children experience mood and behaviour changes that are completely normal, if you notice symptoms persisting for more than a few weeks, you should talk to your child and ask how they are doing. Let them know you are there for them, no matter what. You can also reach out to a professional or trusted community member. A good place to start is with your family doctor. They will be able to refer you to a child psychologist or other mental health professional.



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# Common Mental Health Symptoms

## Emotional changes & mood swings



Mood disorders are a group of mental health disorders that are very common.

A mood disorder is a mental health disorder that mostly affects a person's emotional state. This means that the person suffering can often be sad, anxious, angry, etc.

Examples of mood disorders include major depressive disorder (depression), bipolar disorder, etc.

### 1 Drastic changes in mood, personality, and behaviour



### 2 Changes in eating or sleeping patterns



### 3 Feeling isolated, sad, hopeless, worthless or guilty



### 4 Fatigue, having no energy to care



### 5 Anxiety or irritability

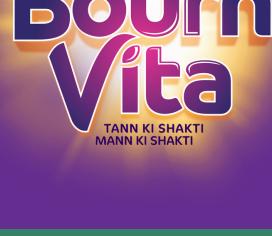


### 6 Thoughts or talking about dying or self-harm



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# How to talk to kids about mental health

## What to say & examples

If you notice that your child's behaviour has changed recently, and they seem to be struggling, there are many ways you can support them. The best way to start is by opening a dialogue with them and making them feel comfortable discussing difficult and personal issues with you. Here's some ways you can do that!

**Be there for them.** Let them know you're there to listen to anything they might want to talk about. Assure them that you support them and will not get angry, no matter what they express to you.

**Validate their feelings.** Tell them that it's normal to feel sad, angry, scared, and stressed sometimes, and that you feel that way too sometimes. Empathize with them by saying things like "that sounds really difficult", etc.

**Express your intention.** Try telling your child that you have noticed them feeling sad or acting differently, and let them know that you want to help them.

**Start the conversation early.** Give your child opportunities to open up to you by creating space for healthy discussions from a young age. This will make communication easier as your child grows up. Start by asking open-ended questions, like 'did you talk to your friends today?'

**Model conversations about mental health.** To get your child to see that it is okay to talk about their feelings, talk about your own! Do not burden them or share age-appropriate information with them, but sharing that you - for example - do yoga because it keeps you mentally fit is a positive way to start the conversation.

**Seek help.** If you are still struggling to connect with your child, reach out to a mental health professional who will be able to tell you how to support your child. Sometimes, your child will feel more comfortable speaking to someone else, and that is okay too. Your family doctor will be able to refer you to a mental health professional.

## What to say:

I know what you're going through is really difficult, and you're so strong.

I've noticed you've seemed to be struggling recently. Do you want to talk about it?

I'm here to listen to you anytime you need, no matter what.

Don't worry, it's normal to feel sad/angry/scared sometimes. How can I help?

I love you no matter what!

When I am upset, I like to practise yoga/write in my journal/talk to a friend because it helps me feel better.

Sometimes it's easier to talk to someone outside of the family. Would you be comfortable talking to [insert name]?



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# How to talk to kids about mental health

## What NOT to say & examples

If you notice that your child's behaviour has changed recently, and they seem to be struggling, there are many ways you can support them. The best way to start is by opening a dialogue with them and making them feel comfortable discussing difficult and personal issues with you. Here's some things to avoid when talking to them!

**Don't take it personally.** If your child does not feel comfortable telling you how they feel yet, don't be offended. It can be difficult for children to share - they may be scared of a negative reaction or unsure how to talk about difficult subject matters.

**Don't pressure them into talking.** If you create a comfortable and safe environment for them, they will open up to you in time. Pressuring them will not help.

**Don't judge them or punish them.** When your child trusts you enough to talk about their mental health with you, the worst thing you can do is judge them or punish them for sharing their feelings. This will discourage them from opening up to you again, closing the line of communication, and making it difficult for them to get help and feel better.

**Don't doubt their experience.** A common reaction for parents is to tell their children that their issues are 'not a big deal', and that childhood and adolescence is the easiest stage of life. This invalidates their struggle.

**Don't ignore small issues.** It is easy to feel that small issues will pass with time, but sometimes they are an indicator of underlying issues. Look out for recurring issues.

**Don't try to 'fix' it yourself.** If a child is struggling with school or peers, oftentimes parents will try to solve the issue themselves by inserting themselves in the situation. This is usually counterproductive as children are much more likely to address the issue when they have been allowed to think of the solution themselves.

## What NOT to say:

Just wait until you're an adult - that's when the real problems start.

Just relax!

If someone is bothering you, just tell me. I'll handle them for you.

You're lying, I don't think that's what really happened.

I'm your parent, you have to tell me what the problem is right now.

If you keep acting like this, I will punish you.

You're just a kid, these issues aren't a big deal. Your childhood is the best time of your life! Just enjoy it.



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