



Youth Mental Health:

How Adults Can Prevent, Recognize and Intervene with Mental Disorders



Mental disorders: More common than you think

Mental disorders are mental health conditions with abnormalities in our ability to effectively think, act and share emotions.

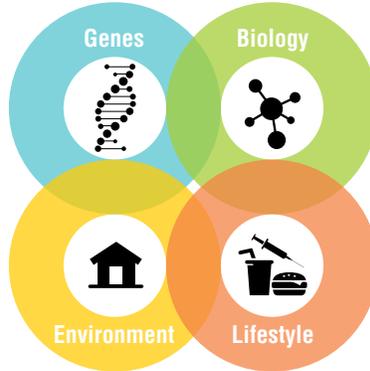
- **1 in 5** youth ages 9 to 17 has a mental disorder that causes some degree of impairment.
- **Only 1/3** of these adolescents has received necessary treatment.
- **1 in 10** adolescents has a disorder that causes significant impairment.
- Suicide is the **second leading cause of death** in young people ages 15 to 24.

(CDC, 2020)

What is mental health: emotional, psychological and social well-being

- It affects how we think, feel and act.
- It is the interaction among genes, environment, biology and lifestyle.
- It impacts how we cope with life events, interact with others and make life choices.
- Remember that this is an American culture's interpretation of mental health.

(Gopalkrishnan, 2018; Mental Health, 2019)



Risk factors for youth

Here are a few factors that put youth more at risk for developing a mental disorder:

- Bullying/cyberbullying and social exclusion
- Gender differences/gender identity issues
- Issues with sleeping
- Low self-esteem
- Fluctuating hormones (puberty)
- Trauma
- High-stress environmental factors such as poverty, unsafe living conditions or family conflict

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009)

Warning signs to look for

Consider the youth's life holistically before assuming these warning signs are due to a mental disorder.

- ✗ Sleeping too much or not enough
- ✗ Extreme weight gain or weight loss
- ✗ Irritable or detached mood for a majority of the day
- ✗ Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness
- ✗ Avoidance of social situations and withdrawing
- ✗ Use of drugs or alcohol
- ✗ Extremely low self-concept and self-esteem



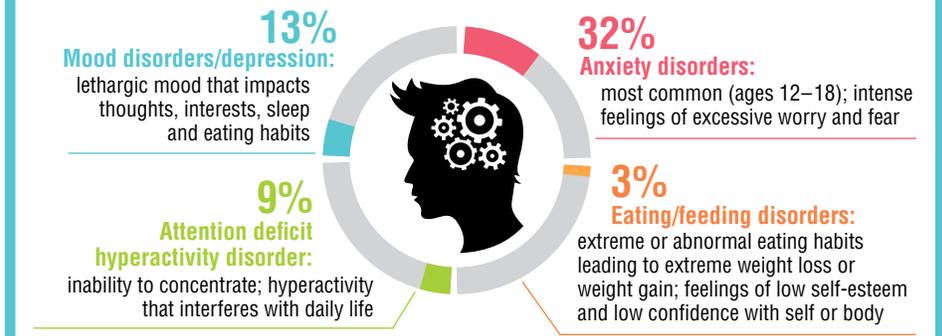
(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012)

NDSU EXTENSION 

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Common mental disorders in youth



(U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019)

Normal vs. abnormal emotional development

While some things youth say or do might seem “abnormal” to adults, many are considered part of normal emotional development.

“Normal” behaviors: increased expression of emotions, spending less time with family, concerns about body image, high personal expectations, regression of behavior for days at a time, expressing interest in opposite sex (or same sex), testing parental rules/limits, contemplation of experimentation with drugs/alcohol

“Abnormal” behaviors: unhealthy coping strategies (self-harm, induced vomiting, suppressing emotions, hurting others), excessive and constant moodiness, extreme behaviors and emotions, any of the warning signs lasting a majority of the time and consistent across contexts and situations

If your youth exhibits behaviors that are considered abnormal, contact a mental health specialist for more assistance.

(Mental Health America, n.d.)

Cultural considerations

- The definition of mental health and diagnosis of mental disorders may differ across cultures, races, ethnicities, families, personal identities, etc.
- Accessibility to mental health services is vastly different across cultures and communities.
- Never assume someone has a similar view of mental health. If you are unsure, ask what mental health means to that person.
- Consider cultural differences when observing mental health concerns. Is the behavior considered normal in another culture?
- **Always be culturally aware.** You do not need to learn every culture, but be empathetic to the idea that every culture is different while celebrating diversity.

(Gopalkrishnan, 2018)

September 2020

NATIONAL
SUICIDE
PREVENTION
LIFELINE
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
suicidepreventionlifeline.org
 THE CRISIS TEXT HOTLINE
Text CONNECT to 741741

Immediate suicide intervention techniques

If you notice any signs of suicidal thoughts or ideation, follow these steps for how you can be prepared to help:

- Do not leave the student/child alone. Get them to a safe and private environment while remaining calm.
- Always contact the school mental health professional or a local mental health professional if at home. Contact the emergency suicide hotline (1-800-273-8255) if the risk for suicide is high.
- Ask them if they have immediate thoughts of harming themselves. Remove necessary items that might be an immediate risk for self-harm.
- Express your care and concern for them and listen nonjudgmentally. If they are unwilling/unable to talk, sit and wait quietly for help.
- While you wait, provide them with resources and ensure them you will assist in getting the help they need. Resources are listed at the end of this publication.
- After the incident, follow up. Show that you will continue to be there for them.



(American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2018)

Effective youth coping strategies



Exercise regularly and eat balanced meals.



Get a recommended 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night.



Avoid using drugs and alcohol and drinking excess caffeine.



Learn and practice relaxation, mindfulness and breathing techniques.



Replace negative self-talk with positive self-talk by utilizing a reframing technique.



Take breaks from stressful situations when necessary, especially from social media.



Build a firm support system of friends, family, peers, teachers, etc. Reach out when you need help or feel alone.



Identify tasks or hobbies that make you happy and schedule time to do them regularly.

(American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2019)

Promoting positive mental health in schools and communities

- Be an advocate for mental health and set a good example by taking care of your own mental health.
- Create a positive and supportive environment for youth with mental disorders to feel validated. Mental health is real and it is important to discuss. Make talking about mental health a **normal** and open conversation.
- Provide safety and security by creating a safety plan. (ex: Where to go when they are having an anxiety attack.)
- Educate others about the prevalence of mental disorders and the importance of promoting positive mental health in youth.
- Help youth practice healthy coping skills and continue to educate on ways they can improve their mental health.
- Promote physical well-being along with mental health (exercise, healthful eating, sleep, limiting screen time).
- Being aware and able to recognize signs that youth are struggling is important in ensuring they get adequate help and support immediately.

(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018; National Association of School Psychologists, 2017)



Youth mental health resources:

- You Matter
- Youth Suicide Prevention
- The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number: **1-800-273-8255 (TALK)**
- National Institute of Mental Health: Child and Adolescent Mental Health
- NDSU References and Resources for Addressing Youth Issues Publication

Apps for youth to promote mental health:

- **Calm:** Mindfulness, meditation, breathing exercises
- **Happify:** Good-mood training program
- **Daylio:** Mood tracker and journal

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Mental Health Matters