

Children's Mental Health

It can be hard to tell the difference between behaviors and emotions that are typical of a child's development and those that signal a potentially serious issue.

If a child is presenting an immediate risk of danger to themselves or others, call 911. If a child talks about self-harm, call **the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Trained crisis workers are available to talk, assess the level of risk, and develop a plan to help keep the child safe. In South Dakota, this line is answered by the Helpline Center.

Is this just a stage or is this a problem?

Challenging behaviors and turbulent emotions are a part of growing up, but some children develop mental health issues – the most common are attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and behavior disorders. There are signs that a child needs help. If the behavior:

- Lasts for a few weeks or longer
- Causes distress for the child or the family
- Interferes with daily functioning

What do you do?

If you are concerned about a child's mental health, taking the first steps towards help include:

- Talk with others involved in the child's life – teachers, daycare workers, coaches and other parents may have helpful insights.
- Talk with the child's pediatrician. A physical exam may uncover a reason for the problem.
- Ask for a referral to a mental health professional who works with children. An evaluation will help determine the best way to help a child struggling with mental health issues.

Treatment options

Treating a child's mental health issues can help reduce problems at home and school. Therapy options for children include:

- Play therapy
- Talk therapy
- Behavior therapy
- Parent training for behavior management
- Cognitive-behavior therapy
- Medication may help some children

An explanation of various therapies and what works best for various problems can be found at www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth.

For more information on children's mental health, call 211 or search our online database:

- helplinecenter.org/211database
 - Try the following keyword search terms:
 - Adolescent/Youth Counseling
 - Autism Therapy
 - Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
 - Children's Psychiatric Inpatient Units
 - Children's/Adolescent Residential Treatment Facilities
 - Developmental Screening
 - Parent Counseling
 - Parent Support Groups
 - Play Therapy
 - Specialized Pediatric Evaluation

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Sources:

- National Institute of Mental Health nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/children-and-mental-health/index
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/index

Disclaimer: This HelpSheet is developed by the Helpline Center. HelpSheets provide a brief overview of the designated topic. For more information, call 211 or text your zip code to 898211.

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