

Supporting Your Child's Mental Health

As parents, family members, and teachers, we want good things for the children in our lives. If you are concerned about your child's mental health, there is a lot you can do to impact your child's well-being and future outcomes. The following fact sheet from the National Alliance on Mental Illness can guide you if you are concerned about your child:

What Families Can Do FACT SHEET

If you are worried about your child's mental health, follow your instincts. Unexplained changes in your child's behavior and/or mood may be the early warning signs of a mental health condition and should never be ignored. There are many different types of mental illness, including anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, ADHD and autism spectrum disorder, and it isn't easy to simplify the range of challenges children face.

As a parent, there are things that you should be concerned with if you see them, such as:

- A sudden or persistent drop in school performance.
- Persistently aggressive behavior.
- Threats to self or others.
- Substantial mood swings.
- Hallucinations, paranoia or delusions.
- Acting very withdrawn, sad or overly anxious.
- Extreme difficulty interacting with friends and/or siblings.
- Extreme changes in sleeping and eating patterns.
- Increased or persistent use of alcohol or drugs.

What should parents do if they suspect a mental health condition?

- Talk with your pediatrician. Early identification and intervention are important. If you are concerned about your child, start by talking with your pediatrician, share your concerns and ask for a comprehensive check-up. A comprehensive physical examination should be done to rule out other physical health conditions that may be causing a child's symptoms. If the pediatrician believes your child is exhibiting early signs of a mental health condition, the pediatrician may either talk with you about treatment options or may recommend a referral to a mental health professional or may offer to provide some of the services herself.
- Get a referral to a mental health specialist. If you are referred to a mental health professional, ask your pediatrician to help by calling for you to help get an appointment scheduled for your child. Many mental health professionals have long waiting lists and may not be taking new patients, so a call from your pediatrician can help get an immediate appointment for your child. To find a child psychiatrist, visit the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry website (www.aacap.org) and click on "Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Finder."
- Work with the school to identify effective interventions that promote positive behaviors, social skill development, academic achievement or prevent challenging behaviors in school. Ask your child's treating mental health provider to identify

interventions that can be used at school and at home to help you and your child cope with challenging behaviors and related issues.

- Connect with other families. Never underestimate the importance of connecting with and working with other families. There are many seasoned families who have walked the walk and are happy to share their wisdom and experience with you. Contact NAMI at www.nami.org to learn how you can connect with other families in your community.
- For some children, having a diagnosis is scary and they may be resistant to accept it. Others are relieved to know that what is happening to them can be addressed and that they are not alone. It is important to find ways to use the strengths and interests of your child to help him or her cope with current and future challenges.

Reviewed by Ken Duckworth, M.D., December 2012

If you need immediate counseling, Youth Services of Wisconsin/Briarpatch offers immediate counseling services for youth and families at no charge regardless of insurance. They specialize in working with teens and their parents, helping bridge communication gaps, assisting with challenging family issues, and connecting families to more long-term therapists or programs. Contact 1-800-798-1126 or 608-251-1126.

Youth Services also offers Project HUGS (Have yoU Gotten Support?) which provides, information, support and resources to parents/caregivers of teens and providers of families that work with teens. Support groups, case management, consultations and outreach are offered through our program.

Madison meetings: 4th Saturdays, 10-11:30 am, Trinity Lutheran Church, 1904 Winnebago, Madison. Park in the church parking lot, enter the Atwood Ave door next to church lot. (Next to Chase Bank/the old Youth Services.) Walk upstairs to room 215. About Parent Support Groups: Free, no pre-registration required; Relaxed and comfortable atmosphere; Light refreshments are served; Confidentiality is respected - what is said at group stays at group; and Enjoy conversation with other adults that care for/about teens. (This is an event for adults unless otherwise noted.)

Questions? Contact Briarpatch Youth Services (608-251-1126, 800-798-1126) or Stacey Slotty (stacey.slotty@briarpatch.org or 245-2550 x 1104).

As always, feel free to call the MGHS Student Services staff if you have questions, need additional guidance, or for a list of parent resources.

In support,

MGHS Student Services Staff