

## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Currently, the leading cause of death in individuals between 10-24 years of age is suicide, and the rate of mental health conditions has risen 20.9%. Pediatricians serve a vital role in identifying and managing mental health conditions in children.

### *Pediatricians' Role in Mental Health Care:*

- adapted from the AAP Policy Statement, “Mental Health Competencies for Pediatric Practice” (2019)

- Understand children at each developmental stage, so to identify any behavior that is considered atypical. There is a relationship with the family established to reinforce the connection.
- The initial encounter can focus on adverse childhood experiences, social determinants of health, daily routines, relationships, parental mental health, family disruptions, and while observing the family and child, positive reinforcement can be provided.
- Promote primary prevention by monitoring psychosocial symptoms over the lifespan.
- Promote secondary prevention by identifying risk factors and providing resources that may be needed by families experiencing challenges.
- Evaluate symptoms of mental health emergencies, such as suicide risk and severe functional impairment, and diagnose common mental health diagnoses.
- HELP build a therapeutic alliance: Hope, empathy, language, loyalty, permission, partnership, plan.
- Utilize communication skills to connect with families and encourage them to seek appropriate services from community mental health centers.
- Work with families to develop a multimodal treatment plan; medication management requires monitoring of side effects; and referral to a proper mental health professional
- Collaboration with mental health professionals, family, and child to develop a proper safety plan.

Reference: Foy JM, Green CM, Earls MF, AAP COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH LEADERSHIP WORK GROUP. Mental Health Competencies for Pediatric Practice. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 144(5):e20192757  
<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/144/5/e20192757>