

Children's Mental Health

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES



What is Children's Mental Health?

Children's mental health is the overall wellness of children's thinking, mood, and feeling. It affects children's ability to relate to others and complete daily tasks. Some common children's mental health problems include depression, anxiety, and behavior disorders. Mental health problems are often harder to spot than physical health problems. Paying close attention to your child's behavior can make you aware of potential mental health problems. Mental health is important to children's overall health. It affects their ability to succeed in school, work, and relationships.

What causes mental health problems?

Mental health problems affect people of all ages, races, incomes, religions, and cultures. There are many different factors that can cause mental health problems. These factors include family history, contact with harmful things before birth, negative life experiences, and brain chemistry. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine have found that half of adults with mental illnesses experience symptoms of the illness before age 14.

What should I do if I think my child might have mental health problems?

If you are concerned about your child's mental health, talk to your child's doctor. Describe the behavior that concerns you. Concerning behaviors could include a drop in grades or making threats to self or others. It could include changes in sleeping or eating habits, acting withdrawn or other behaviors that concern you. Ask your child's teachers, caregivers, and loved ones if they have noticed any changes in your child's behavior. Share this information with your child's doctor. You can also ask for an evaluation with a specialist. A specialist could be a psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, or behavioral therapist. Learn as much as you can about the problem or diagnosis. Look for the best treatment for your child.

Can mental health problems be treated?

Yes. Once a diagnosis is made, your child's doctor or specialist can recommend a plan. There are many treatments for mental health problems. Treatments can include talk or behavioral therapy and medications. Make sure to understand the different treatment options. Discuss the options with a health care provider that has experience treating the mental health problems that are affecting your child. When possible, involve your child in the treatment decisions.

How will having a child with a mental health problem affect my family?

Before a child is diagnosed, stress, frustration, and anger may have come up in a family. Mental health providers can provide counseling to the whole family. Counselors can help everyone understand mental health. They can also help family members create new ways of relating with one another. Your child may face challenges in school. Special education services may be available to your child. Remember that you will be your child's most important advocate. Learn about your child's legal and educational rights so that your child can get the support she or he needs.

Please see reverse for resources.



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RESOURCES

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, a *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Training Program. The following are some of the ways the Center's programs and staff can assist families, educators, and other service providers.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a free statewide phone, web, and print referral service in English and Spanish. It connects the Tennessee disability community with service providers and resources. Its website database has over 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county and service. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, TN Department of Health, and the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Contact www.familypathfinder.org, (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636.

Two Easy Ways to Take Part in Research

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center serves families through research studies. StudyFinder is a searchable database that lists current VKC studies, including ASD research. Studies seek people of all ages with and without developmental disabilities. See kc.vanderbilt.edu/studyfinder, (615) 936-0448. Research Match is a secure place for volunteers and researchers to connect. Once you sign up and get added to the registry, a researcher will contact you if you're a possible match for the research study. See www.researchmatch.org.

Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital

Vanderbilt is the only mental health provider that provides overnight stay for children in Middle Tennessee. Child and Adolescent programs provide care for children from ages 4 to 18 who have emotional disorders and need immediate help. See www.vanderbilthealth.com/psychiatrichospital or call (615) 327-7000, (800) 365-2270.

Other Resources

- **STEP (Support and Training for Exceptional Parents)**
Provides free information, advocacy training, and support services to parents. These services are for parents of children eligible to receive special education supports under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and who live in Tennessee.
www.tnstep.org, (800) 280-STEP.
- **Family Voices of Tennessee**
A health information resource for families who have children with special health care needs: disability, chronic illness, and physical or mental health conditions.
www.tndisability.org/familyvoices, (888) 643-7811.
- **Tennessee Voices for Children**
Speaks out as active advocates for the emotional and behavioral well-being of children and their families. They provide advocacy, training, support, referral, prevention, and early intervention services.
www.tnvoices.org, (800) 670-9882.
- **Centerstone**
Provides services that are designed to help children experiencing depression, anger, trauma, abuse, attention deficit disorder and other issues.
www.centerstone.org, (888) 291-4357.
- **Mental Health Cooperative**
Provides assessment, counseling, and treatment to children or teens struggling with emotional or behavioral issues. www.mhc-tn.org, (866) 816-0433.
- **Volunteer Behavioral Health Care System**
Offers mental health and substance abuse services to residents of Tennessee. These services include outpatient, crisis management, residential, consultation, and education. vbhcs.org, (877) 567-6051, (800) 704-2651 (crisis line).
- **NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)**
The nation's largest grassroots mental health organization. It is dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.
www.namidavidson.org, (615) 891-4724.

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