

Understanding & Supporting

Youth Mental Health



Mental health lies on a continuum and includes our emotional, psychological and social well being. Important at every stage of life, mental health affects the way a person thinks, feels, relates to others, and behaves. Just like physical health, mental health can and does shift, change, or evolve throughout life.

When our children show signs of physical illness, such as fever or intense pain, we understand that medical intervention or professional help may be necessary to improve their condition. Because most symptoms of mental health conditions are often intangible or invisible, it can be difficult to understand the difference between age-appropriate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and those that may be signs of concern warranting professional intervention.

We have developed this booklet to provide general guidance for a better understanding of youth mental health development. These lists are not exhaustive and do not include every possible healthy marker or sign of concern.



How do I know if my child's thoughts, feelings or behaviors are "typical" or signs of concern?

This booklet contains examples of healthy development markers and signs of concern during four age ranges. If you are concerned about your child's mental health, ask the following questions:

INTENSITY How intense are your child's behaviors, thoughts or emotions?

FREQUENCY: How often does your child feel or behave this way?

DURATION: How long do these individual episodes or periods last?

FUNCTIONALITY: Above all else, how well is your child functioning in life? Is your child impaired in any way at home, at school, or with friends?

Emotions or behaviors that are more intense, frequent, or longer in duration than most other children your child's age, and that are causing impairment, may be signs of concern that indicate that consulting with a mental health professional may be necessary.



Healthy Developmental Markers

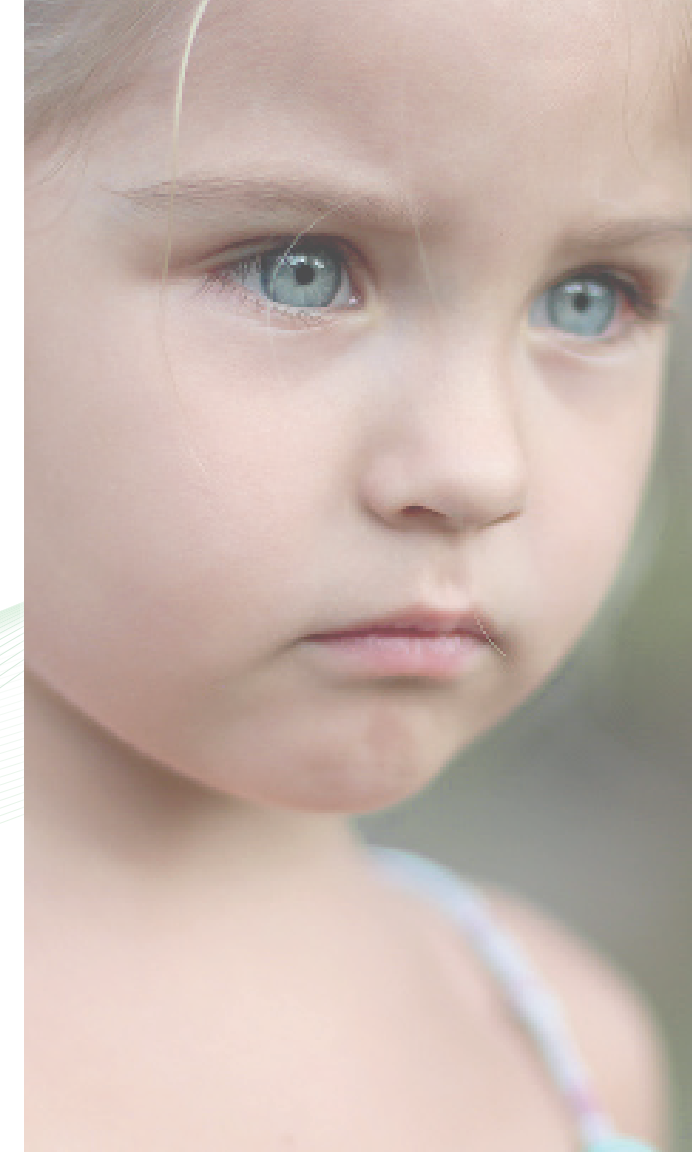
- Attaches to primary caregiver
- Acquires language
- Engages in parallel and imitative play
- Becomes more independent – says “no,” “I want,” “I do it myself”
- Tantrums and crying when they don’t get their way

ALL BABIES are born with
MENTAL HEALTH.

Signs of Concern

- Problems attaching to primary caregiver
- Difficulty with socializing or playing with others
- Inability or no desire to play with others
- Intense difficulty with separation
- Cannot engage in organized activities
- Extreme difficulty or inability to toilet train after the age of 3, bowel holding
- Excessive, inconsolable crying or sadness
- Inability to fall or stay asleep, excessive lack of sleep
- Explosive and prolonged tantrums

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Healthy Developmental Markers

- Engages in school and extra-curricular activities
- Concrete or black and white thinking
- Develops sense of self
- Interested in rules and justice
- Develops friendships
- Learns to cope with challenges

LIKE walking and talking, CHILDREN can learn to
RECOGNIZE and MANAGE EMOTIONS.

Signs of Concern

- Inability to focus, connect or control impulses
- Disinterest in extra-curricular activities or too nervous to attend
- Difficulty making and/or keeping friends
- Obsessive thoughts and behaviors
- Willing and able to break rules without remorse
- Frequent head or stomach aches, other persistent, but unexplainable ailments
- Extreme opposition and explosive behaviors
- Refusal or inability to attend school
- Low tolerance for frustration or discomfort
- Difficulty with transitions or change
- Frequent irritability

During this age,
anxiety, depression,
mood, and processing
disorders may begin to
appear.

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AGES
12 - 17

Healthy Developmental Markers

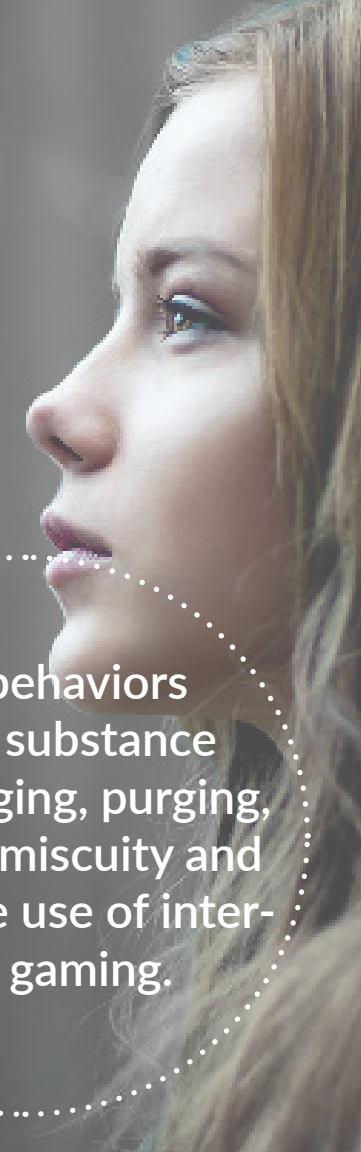
- Becomes independent and self-focused
- Develops personal interests and engages in them
- Able to think in increasingly abstract ways
- Friend groups begin to take the place of family
- Interest in technology and social media
- Becomes argumentative and opinionated
- Has urge to be a night owl and sleeps late on the weekends
- Takes initiative to separate from parents (eg. political differences)
- Increased self-consciousness
- Increased sexual interest
- Increased moodiness

Since MENTAL HEALTH
is often INVISIBLE, problems may be MISSED.

Signs of Concern

- Difficulty identifying personal interests or engaging in them
- Black and white or concrete thinking, hyper-focus
- Social problems that persist with friends
- Experiences anxiety when separating from parents
- Long-lasting intense painful emotions
- School refusal, bullying others, aggression, and/or lack of motivation
- Self-harming or self-destructive behaviors
- Severe mood swings, periods of extreme energy
- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Intense worries or fear
- Extreme lack of personal care or hygiene

Risky behaviors
include: substance
abuse, bingeing, purging,
sexual promiscuity and
compulsive use of inter-
net or gaming.





AGES
18 - 24

Healthy Developmental Markers

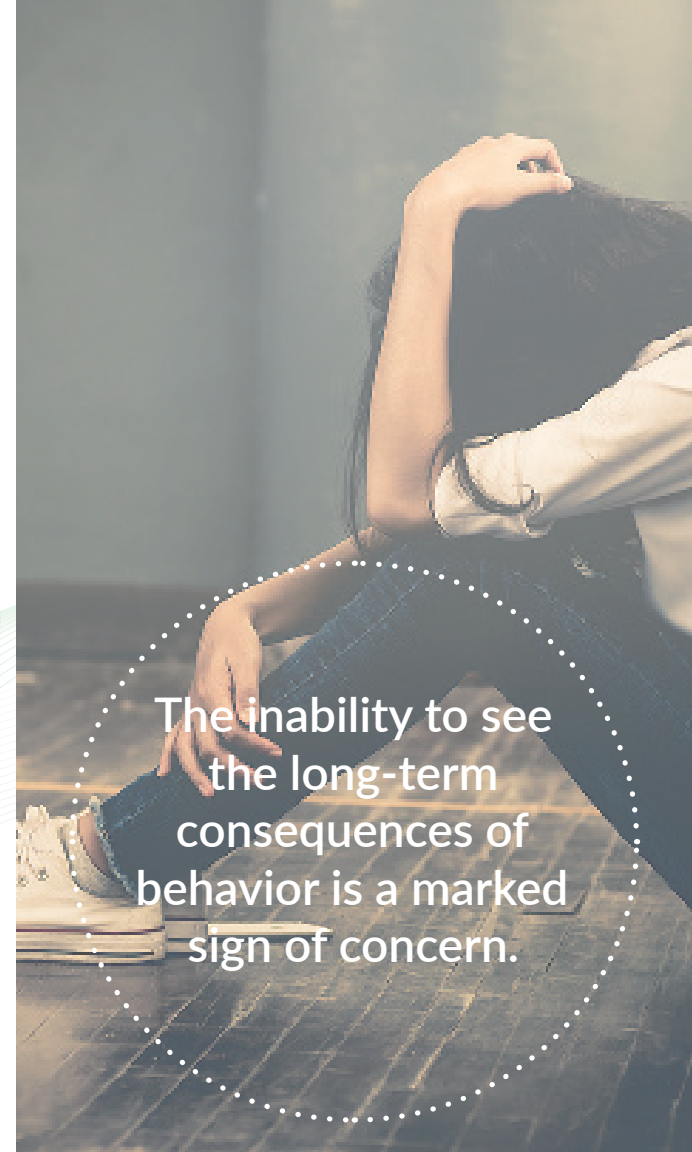
- Develops a career or occupational path (college, job, etc.)
- Engages in a productive career or occupational activities
- Forms and maintains meaningful relationships (friendships and romantic)
- Demonstrates good decision-making and planning skills
- Exhibits resilience and empathy
- Able to apologize

Even with a **MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS**,
people can live **HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE** lives.

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Signs of Concern

- Inability to set goals and work towards them
- Inability to develop and/or maintain friendships and romantic relationships
- Obsessive thoughts and behaviors
- Unable to maintain a regular job or commitment
- Excessive or daily use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Drops out of school
- Inability to delay gratification
- Lack of motivation

A photograph of a person sitting on a wooden floor, hunched over with their head buried in their hands, suggesting distress or despair. The image is partially obscured by a white dotted circle.

The inability to see
the long-term
consequences of
behavior is a marked
sign of concern.

Helpful Parenting Tips

Supporting your children's mental health may be the single most important parenting role you assume for their long-term development. At all ages and stages, children can be both a joy and a challenge. Keeping short quick notes or a journal on a regular basis will help you keep track of what you are experiencing with your child and, if necessary, will help you work with a professional more concretely. Here are some universal tips to help maintain your stamina on your journey through parenthood.

TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN

While it is natural to go through periods when it feels difficult to get your child to talk, remember to do what you can to keep the conversation alive. Consider sharing information about yourself, your day or your thoughts. Try not to be overwhelming or intimidating by sharing too much or asking too many questions. The best way to know what is going on is to check in with them on a regular basis.

SPEND TIME WITH YOUR KIDS

We tend to “go, go, go” and days, weeks and months can pass very quickly. In this fast-paced life, your children will experience many transitions, some small and some very big. Carve out time to be 100% present with your kids. No technology, no distractions - maybe a game or a meal together. Just remember to stop and be there with your kids once and awhile.

BE PATIENT

Let's face it, being a parent can be frustrating, challenging and sometimes quite confusing. Remember to be patient with yourself and your children. Solutions are easier to find when you are calm. Sometimes taking a quick breather can be an invaluable tool.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Kids need constant care; so do you. Look after yourself and your family relationships. The role model we are to our kids is the strongest indicator of who they become. Don't forget to give yourself time to absorb and experience all the joys that parenting has to offer and take breaks when you are overloaded and frustrated.

If your child broke his arm you would most certainly take him to a doctor. Feeling sad or anxious can be a natural part of growing up, but intense feelings and behaviors can also be indications of a mental health problem that requires professional help. Teach your children that mental health is as important as physical health by modeling that there is nothing wrong with seeking help when there are signs of concern. The earlier you intervene, the more likely you will be to prevent a larger issue down the road.

Notes

Notes

This brochure was produced in a partnership between
The Youth Mental Health Project™
&
Silver Hill Hospital.



ymhproject.org
silverhillhospital.org

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