

MHA AZ's mission is to promote the mental health and well-being for all Arizona's through education, advocacy and the shaping of public policy.



## WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

**W**e all have mental health the same way we have physical health and, most importantly, our children have mental health.

Mental health is important at every stage of life and plays a critical role in shaping a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development, all parts of a healthy brain.

Mental health includes all states of health, from wellness to challenges to illness, and describes a person's state of emotional, psychological and social well-being, which affects the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves.

Research shows that children's brains develop well into their mid-20's. It is important to know that children's emotions and behaviors CAN BE signs that they are struggling for a multitude of reasons or for no apparent reason at all.

While not all mental health struggles will lead to a diagnosis, that should not be a deterrent to seeking help and treatment. When a child shows symptoms of a physical illness, whether it is a sore throat or a broken arm, parents do not hesitate to seek treatment. In the same way, parents should not hesitate to seek treatment when symptoms of mental health struggles arise.

## STATISTICS

Mental health conditions are more common than heart disease, lung disease and cancer combined.

SUICIDE is the second leading cause of death in children ages 10 to 24.<sup>1</sup>

ANXIETY is the most common mental health disorder in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

ANXIETY, it is the #1 reason college students seek counseling.<sup>3</sup>

New research is beginning to validate DEPRESSION in children as young as 4 or 5.

By the time children hit age 17, 13.6 percent of boys and 36.1 percent of girls have been or are DEPRESSED.<sup>4</sup>

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Journal what you are observing and experiencing.
- Learn more about children's mental health.
- Allow your child space to talk about emotions openly.
- Validate your child's feelings, even if you might not understand them.
- Talk to your children, just about life.
- Spend some time with your children.
- Reach out for help and know it is not your fault.
- Be patient.
- Take care of yourself, too.

**1 in 5**

children in the U.S. has a diagnosable mental health condition, yet less than 20 percent of those youth receive the treatment they need.

1. Center for Disease Control

2. NIMH

3. American College Health Association Study 2016

4. National Survey of Drug Use and Health from 2009 to 2014

5. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

When you are trying to decide if your children need help, consider how they are functioning at home, at school and/or in their social lives.

**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.

## SIGNS A CHILD IS STRUGGLING CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Disruption in sleep - Nightmares
- Lack of motivation
- Inability to focus, connect, or control impulses
- Loss of appetite
- Changes in personal care
- Long-lasting, intense, painful emotions
- Intense worry
- Increased irritability, anger, or moodiness
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Increased stomach aches or other persistent unexplainable ailments
- Disinterest in extra-curricular activities or too nervous to attend

## TREATMENT

**D**o not delay treatment. The average delay between the first onset of symptoms and getting treatment is 8-10 years.<sup>2</sup>

Half of all lifetime cases of diagnosable mental health conditions begin before the age of 14 and 75% before the age of 24.<sup>2</sup>

Early intervention can help children/adolescents develop important coping and adaptive skills (e.g., resilience), allowing them to thrive socially, emotionally, academically, and physically.

With proper treatment and support, people with a mental health diagnosis can lead productive and fulfilling lives. In fact, 80-90% of people who get treatment see improvement in their symptoms.<sup>6</sup>

**For more  
information:**

Mental Health  
America of Arizona

[www.mhaarizona.org](http://www.mhaarizona.org)