



The Mental Health & Well Being of our Children

Like adults, children and adolescents can have mental health problems that interfere with the way they think, feel, and act. In addition to biology and genetics, there are events in the life of children that can have adverse affects on physical and mental health. However, the developmental stages of life through age 18 provide many opportunities for parents and caregivers to assist their child in developing mental health.

A variety of signs may point to mental health disorders or serious emotional disturbances. If we pay close attention we will see and hear the verbal and non-verbal ways our children show they need our help.

Children need our support and assistance when they are troubled by the one or more of the following:

- feeling sad and hopeless for no reason;
- very angry most of the time; crying a lot or overacting to things;
- often worthless or guilty; often anxious or worried;
- unable to get over a loss or death of someone important;
- extremely fearful or having unexplained fears; constantly concerned about physical problems or physical appearance;
- frightened that his or her mind might be controlled or is out of control.

Or you may notice extreme changes in routines such as the following:

- showing declining performance in school;
- loss of interest in things they used to enjoy;
- experiencing unexplained changes in sleep or diet;
- avoiding friends or family;
- wanting to be alone all of the time; daydreaming too much or not completing tasks;
- feeling life is too hard to handle;
- hearing voices that cannot be explained;
- experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Listen, and take a child seriously when they experience one or more of the following:

- poor concentration and are unable to think straight or make up their mind;
- unable to sit still or focus attention;
- worry about being harmed, hurting others or doing something "bad";
- a need to wash, clean things or perform certain routines over and over again in order to avoid a danger that can't be substantiated;
- racing thoughts that are too fast to follow;
- persistent nightmares

Some children behave outwardly in ways that cry out for someone to stop the pain including one or more of the following:

- using alcohol or other drugs;
- eating large amounts of food and then purging, or abusing laxatives, to avoid weight gain;
- dieting and/or exercising obsessively;
- violating the rights of others or constantly breaking the law without regard for other people;
- setting fires;
- doing things that can be life threatening to self or others and harming or killing animals.

Children and adolescents with mental health issues need to get help as soon as possible. The first call you make will be the beginning of services intended to heal, recover health and stability for your child and family. Services can be found by calling your specific insurance plan; 2-1-1 or visiting www.211.org for low cost counseling referrals; or calling Ventura County Behavioral Health at 1-866-998-2243.