



YOUTH & MENTAL HEALTH

A Mental Health Guide for Parents

**Silence
the ~~Shame~~**

Silence the Shame, Inc. is a mental health education and awareness non-profit organization. Silence the Shame became a movement in 2016 by Music Industry Veteran Shanti Das, fighting to pull back the layers of shame and eliminate mental health stigma. Established as a non-profit in 2017, we empower and educate communities on mental health and wellness. We envision being a world leader in erasing the stigma and educating communities on mental wellness through community conversations, compelling content, and outreach programs. This is achieved through strategic partnerships, global communications, and thoughtful dialogue regarding disparities among vulnerable populations.

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OVERVIEW



Being mentally healthy during childhood means reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills, and how to cope when there are problems. Mentally healthy children have a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, and their communities. It is typical for children and youth to experience various emotional distress as they develop and mature. For example, it is common for children to experience anxiety about school or short periods of sadness. However, when symptoms persist, it may be time to seek professional assistance.

As with physical health, mental health is not merely the absence of disease or a mental health disorder. While most young people are healthy, physically and emotionally, one in every five youth in the general population meets the criteria for a lifetime mental disorder. In addition, physical, emotional, and social changes, including exposure to poverty, abuse, or violence, can make youth vulnerable to mental health problems.

Youth with mental health disorders may face challenges in their homes, school, community, and interpersonal relationships. However, despite these challenges, mental distress is not permanent. Most young people with a mental illness can successfully navigate challenges from experiencing a mental health disorder with treatment, peer and professional support and services, and a strong family and social support network.

Since the pandemic began, young people's psychological distress rates have increased. The pandemic is most heavily affecting those who were already vulnerable. This includes youth with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, and other marginalized communities.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

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If there is concern that a child may be experiencing a mental health problem, caregivers need to seek help from a doctor or mental health professional. Just like with physical illness, early treatment for mental health problems can prevent a more serious illness from developing in the future.

Young children may benefit from an evaluation and treatment if they:

- Have frequent tantrums or are intensely irritable much of the time
- Often talk about fears or worries
- Complain about frequent stomachaches or headaches with no known medical cause
- Are in constant motion and cannot sit quietly (except when they are watching videos or playing videogames)
- Sleep too much or too little, have frequent nightmares or seem sleepy during the day
- Are not interested in playing with other children or have difficulty making friends
- Struggle academically or have experienced a recent decline in grades
- Repeat actions or check things often out of fear that something bad may happen.

Older children and adolescents may benefit from an evaluation if they:

- Have lost interest in things that they used to enjoy
- Have low energy
- Sleep too much or too little, or seem sleepy throughout the day
- Are spending more and more time alone and avoid social activities with friends or family
- Diet or exercise excessively, or fear gaining weight
- Engage in self-harm behaviors (such as cutting or burning their skin)
- Smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs
- Engage in risky or destructive behavior alone or with friends
- Have thoughts of suicide
- Have periods of highly elevated energy and activity, and require much less sleep than usual
- Say that they think someone is trying to control their mind or that they hear things that other people cannot hear.



CAUSES & RISK FACTORS

Adolescence is a critical period for developing healthy social and emotional habits. For example, good habits include healthy sleep patterns, exercising regularly, developing coping, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills, and learning to manage emotions. In addition, protective and supportive environments in the family, school, and broader community are essential.

The presence or absence of various combinations of protective and risk factors contribute to the mental health of youth, and efforts can be undertaken to promote positive mental health and prevent or reduce mental health challenges. Other vital determinants include the quality of their home life and relationships with peers. In addition, violence (especially sexual violence and bullying), harsh parenting, and severe socioeconomic problems are recognized risks to mental health.



Exposure to Adversity



Pressure to Conform with Peers



Exploration of Identity

One in six U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year. Mental disorders among children are described as serious changes in how children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, which cause distress and problems getting through the day. Although the exact cause of most mental health disorders is known, many of these conditions are caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and environmental factors.

Common disorders in childhood are attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety (fears or worries), and behavior disorders. Other childhood disorders and concerns that affect how children learn, behave, or handle their emotions can include learning and developmental disabilities, autism, and risk factors like substance use and self-harm.



TREATMENT & SUPPORT

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Therapy, medications, or lifestyle management can treat and manage childhood mental disorders. Taking advantage of all the resources available will help parents, health professionals, and educators guide the child toward success. Early diagnosis and appropriate services for children and their families can make a difference.

What Caregivers Can Do

- Care for your children's mental health just as you do for their physical health.
- Pay attention to warning signs, and if you're concerned that there might be a problem, seek professional help.
- Let your children know that everyone experiences pain, fear, sadness, worry, and anger and that these emotions are a normal part of life, and encourage them to talk about their concerns and express their feelings.
- Be a role model—talk about your feelings, apologize, don't express anger with violence, and use active problem-solving skills.
- Encourage your children's talents and skills while also accepting their limitations.
- Celebrate your children's accomplishments.
- Give your children opportunities to learn and grow, including being involved in their school and community and with other caring adults and friends.
- Think of "discipline" as a form of teaching rather than physical punishment.
- Set clear expectations and be consistent and fair with consequences for misbehavior; make sure to acknowledge both positive and negative behavior.

As a caregiver, you play an integral role in supporting your child if they experience mental health struggles. There are many ways to help and support your child if diagnosed with a mental health disorder. First, inform yourself about your child's mental health disorder and create a positive home environment. Next, connect with your student's school team to ensure there is appropriate support for your child. Finally, encourage resiliency through connectedness, helping others, and problem-solving. Find an outside provider if your child does not feel comfortable talking to you (therapist, school-based counselor, school psychologist, etc.) Explore ways that you can practice self-care.



RESOURCES

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01 Children's Mental Health

Visit [cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth](https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth) to learn more about youth mental health, risk factors, and how you can help your child.

02 American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Visit www.aacap.org to receive facts and resources for families about mental health and how to get help.

03 National Federation of Families

The National Federation of Families is a national family-run organization linking more than 120 chapters and state organizations focused on the issues of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs.

04 Teen Help

Visit [TeenHelp.com](https://www.teenhelp.com) to find resources for youth and parents navigating life challenges and common adolescent development issues.

05 The Trevor Project

Call 1-866-488-7386 to access crisis intervention and suicide prevention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth. TrevorText START to 678-678.

06 Mental Health America

Find resources and help guides on how to have conversations with your children by visiting mhnational.org/mental-health-resources-parents.

07 Crisis Text Line

Text SILENCE to 707070 to be connected to a trained Crisis Counselor. The Crisis Text Line provides free, text-based support 24/7.

08 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-8255 to access a national network of local crisis centers providing free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24/7.

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PODCAST



If you need to connect with someone,
text "**SILENCE**" to 741741