



Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Overview

Teen Depression Study: Understanding Depression in Teenagers
[Join a Research Study: Enrolling nationally from around the country](#)

Mental health is an important part of overall health for children as well as adults. For many adults who have mental disorders, symptoms were present—but often not recognized or addressed—in childhood and youth. For a young person with symptoms of a mental disorder, the earlier treatment is started, the more effective it can be. Early treatment can help prevent more severe, lasting problems as a child grows up.

Warning Signs

It can be tough to tell if troubling behavior in a child is just part of growing up or a problem that should be discussed with a health professional. But if there are signs and symptoms that last weeks or months; and if these issues interfere with the child's daily life, not only at home but at school and with friends, you should contact a health professional.

Your child or teen might need help if he or she:

- Often feels anxious or worried
- Has very frequent tantrums or is intensely irritable much of the time
- Has frequent stomachaches or headaches with no physical explanation
- Is in constant motion, can't sit quietly for any length of time
- Has trouble sleeping, including frequent nightmares
- Loses interest in things he or she used to enjoy
- Avoids spending time with friends
- Has trouble doing well in school, or grades decline
- Fears gaining weight; exercises, diets obsessively
- Has low or no energy
- Has spells of intense, inexhaustible activity
- Harms herself/himself, such as cutting or burning her/his skin
- Engages in risky, destructive behavior
- Harms self or others
- Smokes, drinks, or uses drugs
- Has thoughts of suicide
- Thinks his or her mind is controlled or out of control, hears voices

Mental illnesses can be treated. If you are a child or teen, talk to your parents, school counselor, or health care provider. If you are a parent and need help starting a conversation with your child or teen about mental health, visit <http://www.mentalhealth.gov/>. If you are unsure where to go for help, ask your pediatrician or family doctor or [visit NIMH's Help for Mental Illnesses](#) webpage.

It may be helpful for children and teens to save several emergency numbers to their cell phones. The ability to get immediate help for themselves or for a friend can make a difference.

- The phone number for a trusted friend or relative
- The non-emergency number for the local police department
- The Crisis Text Line: 741741
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

If you or your child is thinking about harming yourself [get help immediately](#). You can call 911 or the [National Suicide Prevention Line](#) at **1.800.273.TALK (8255)**.

Latest News



[NIH Releases First Dataset from Unprecedented Study of Adolescent Brain Development](#)

February 13, 2018 • Press Release

The National Institutes of Health released to the scientific community an unparalleled dataset from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) study.

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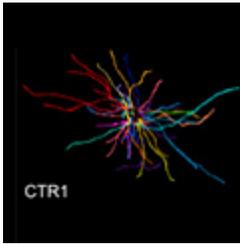


[Intramural Researchers Develop Suicide Risk Screening Toolkit for Medical Settings](#)

January 12, 2018 • Science Update

NIMH researchers have developed a brief screening questionnaire for medical professionals to identify youth at risk for suicide.

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Patient-Derived Support Cells Stunt Mouse Brain Development

August 7, 2017 • Science Update

Support cells generated from patients with childhood onset schizophrenia stunted neural circuit development when grafted into developing mouse brains.

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Health Topics and Resources

Featured Health Topics

- [Anxiety Disorders](#)
- [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD, ADD\)](#)
- [Autism Spectrum Disorders \(ASD\)](#)
- [Bipolar Disorder \(Manic-Depressive Illness\)](#)
- [Coping with Traumatic Events](#)
- [Depression](#)
- [Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder](#)
- [Eating Disorders](#)
- [Medications: Children and Teens](#)
- [Suicide Prevention](#)

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Federal Resources

- **Mental health surveillance among children – United States, 2005—2011:** This CDC report describes the number of U.S. children aged 3–17 years who have specific mental disorders used data collected from a variety of data sources between the years 2005-2011.
- **For Educators: MentalHealth.gov:** Educators are often the first to notice mental health problems. Here are some ways you can help students and their families
- **For Friends and Family: Mentalhealth.gov:** Anyone can experience mental health problems. Friends and family can make all the difference in a person's [recovery process](#).
- **Self-harm: Medline Plus:** Self-harm refers to a person's harming their own body on purpose. It tends to begin in teen or early adult years. Learn more at on the [Medline Plus Self-Harm](#) webpage.
- **NIDA for Teens website** is a project of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), National Institutes of Health (NIH). Created for middle and high school students and their teachers, this website provides accurate and timely information for use in and out of the classroom.
- **Find help for Mental Illnesses**

Featured Videos



Bullying Exerts Psychiatric Effects Into Adulthood

Bullies and victims alike are at risk for psychiatric problems such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicide when they become adults, reported a study partially funded by the NIMH



Development of the Young Brain

For more than twenty years, neuroscientist Dr. Jay Giedd has studied the development of the adolescent brain. Decades of imaging work have led to remarkable insight and a more than a few surprises.



National Database for Autism Research

Researchers, advocates, and parents of children with autism talk about the importance of taking part in autism research and contributing to the National Database for Autism Research.

Health Hotlines

- The **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** is a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. By calling 1-800-273-TALK (8255) you'll be connected to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center in your area, anytime 24/7.
- **Disaster Distress Hotline:** People affected by any disaster or tragedy can call the Disaster Distress Helpline, sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, to receive immediate counseling. Calling 1-800-985-5990 will connect you to a trained professional from the closest crisis counseling center within the network.
- **TXT 4 HELP Interactive:** National Safe Place has created TXT 4 HELP Interactive, which allows youth to text live with a mental health professional.
- **Crisis Text Line:** help is available 24 hours a day throughout the US by texting START to 741741
- [More](#)

Clinical Trials

Children are not little adults, yet they are often given medicines and treatments that were only tested in adults. There is a lot of evidence that children's developing brains and bodies can respond to medicines and treatments differently than how adults respond. The way to get the best treatments for children is through research designed specifically for them.

Should your child participate in a clinical study?

Parents and caregivers may have many questions when they are considering enrolling a child in a clinical study, and that children and adolescents also want to know what they will go through. NIMH is committed to ensuring that families trying to decide whether to enroll their child in a clinical study get all the information they need to feel comfortable and make informed decisions. The safety of children remains the utmost priority for all NIMH and NIH research studies.

For more information, visit [NIH Clinical Trials and You: For Parents and Children](#). To find studies for children and teens being conducted at the NIMH, visit [Join a Study: Children](#). To find a clinical trial near you, visit www.clinicaltrials.gov.

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