



## Child and Youth Mental Health Planning Partnership

### YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH

#### A Parent's Guide to Recognizing Mental and Behavioral Issues for School-Aged Children and Youth

#### If you are reading these words . . .

you are probably an adult who cares deeply about the life and health of a child. Sometimes it becomes difficult to know the best way to love and guide your child. You may notice behaviors in your child that puzzle, annoy, or even frighten you. Some of these are the normal stages of growth and development.

#### What is Mental Health?

Mental health is how we think, feel, and act in order to face life's situations. It is how we look at ourselves, our lives, and the people we know and care about. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, evaluate our options, and make important choices. Like physical health, mental health is important at every stage of life.

#### Mental Health Problems

It's easy for parents to recognize when a child has a high fever. A child's mental health problems may be more difficult to identify. Mental health problems can't always be seen, but are just as real as a broken arm. But the symptoms can be recognized.

Mental health issues can be diagnosed because mental health professionals have studied and documented the symptoms. Some of these problems are depression, anxiety, conduct, eating, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders.

#### Nurturing Your Child's Mental Health

As parents you are responsible for your child's physical safety and emotional wellbeing. There is not one right way to raise a child. Parenting styles vary, but all caregivers should agree on expectations for your child.

- ✓ Encourage your child to express his or her feelings; respect those feelings.
- ✓ Help your child express anger positively without resorting to violence.
- ✓ Listen to your child and encourage questions.
- ✓ Provide comfort and assurance. Be honest, but focus on the positives.
- ✓ Express your willingness to talk about any subject.
- ✓ Help your child deal with life's ups and downs.
- ✓ Show confidence in your child's ability to handle problems and new experiences.
- ✓ Discipline constructively, fairly and consistently.
- ✓ Show approval for positive behaviors.
- ✓ Help your child learn from his or her mistakes.
- ✓ All children and families are different; learn what is effective for your child.

#### Know the Warning Signs

A variety of signs may point to a possible mental health problem in a child or teenager. Some of them are listed here.

#### Pay attention if a child you know . . .

- is continually sad and hopeless without good reason;
- is very angry most of the time, cries a lot, or overreacts to things;
- is excessively anxious or worried;
- holds on to grief for a prolonged time;
- is extremely fearful or has unexplained fears;
- is constantly concerned about physical problems or appearance;
- is frightened that his or her mind is controlled or is out of control.
- does much worse in school;
- loses interest in things he/she usually enjoyed;
- has an unexplained change in sleeping or eating habits;
- avoids friends or family and wants to be alone all the time;
- daydreams too much and can't get things done;
- feels life is too hard to handle or talks about suicide;
- hears voices that cannot be explained;
- is using alcohol or drugs;
- eats large amounts of food and then forces vomiting;
- diets or exercises obsessively;
- often hurts other people, destroys property, or breaks the law.

#### AUSTIN AREA RESOURCES

##### Mental Health

Austin Travis Co. MHMR 472-HELP (4357)  
<http://www.atcmhmr.com/>  
Austin Child Guidance Ctr. 451-2242  
<http://www.austinchildguidance.org/>  
Lifeworks 735-2400  
<http://www.lifeworksweb.org/site/>  
SafePlace 356-1600  
<http://www.safeplace.org>

##### Substance Abuse

Phoenix House 440-0613, ext. 4741  
Palmer Drug Abuse Program 927-0422  
Youth Advocacy 444-9505  
OSAR – Office of Substance Abuse and Referral, 703-1358

##### Suicide Prevention

Suicide Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
Crisis Hotline 472-HELP (4357)

#### WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT MY CHILD?

Your child's

- School Counselor,
- School Nurse,
- School-to-Community Liaison (SCL), and
- Family Physician
- Communities in Schools staff (on 40 AISD campuses)

are professionally trained to help parents and guardians talk about and access the appropriate resources in the community.

**THIS BROCHURE MAY BE DOWNLOADED AT NO COST AT THE FOLLOWING ADDRESSES:**

[www.caction.org/cymhnp/index.html](http://www.caction.org/cymhnp/index.html)

*(Click on Documents)*

[www.austinisd.org/community/access/](http://www.austinisd.org/community/access/)

*(Click on Document Library)*

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/)

Mental Health America 1-800-969-NMHA (6642)  
[www.MentalHealthAmerica.net](http://www.MentalHealthAmerica.net)

Mental Health America of Texas  
454-3706  
[www.mhatexas.org](http://www.mhatexas.org)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
420-9810 or 1-800-633-3760  
<http://www.nami.org> or <http://www.namiaustin.org>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
Information Line: 1-888-333-AFSP (2377)  
[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

**Help Lines**  
Pick up phone and dial 211