

Youth Mental Health January 2008

Children and adolescents in today's world have to deal with problems that we didn't even recognize a generation ago...and it's more difficult than ever to tell what is normal and acceptable from what is a problem.

There are several different mental disorders that may be diagnosed in children. To name a few:

- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorders (behavior regression)
- Disruptive Behavior Disorder
- Conduct Disorders
- Dyslexia
- Learning Disorders
- Childhood Eating Disorders
- Autism
- Mental Retardation

It can be hard to determine if a youth's behavior is just a phase or an indication of more serious difficulty. The following check list of warning signs can help determine if a youth is experiencing problems that may require a professional evaluation:

- Changing groups of friends
- Uninterested in favorite activities
- Irritable or short-tempered
- Increased frequency of arguments
- Eating or sleeping problems
- Poor school performance
- Suspected alcohol or drug use
- Talk about death or suicide
- Suicidal thoughts or gestures
- Multiple physical complaints
- Continuing physical problems
- Increased periods of depression or agitation
- Running away from home
- Fire starting
- Hyperactivity

(Source: BryanLGH brochure on Youth Psychiatric and Mental Health Services)

Too many people respond negatively when confronted with a friend's mental illness; this only fuels the stigma surrounding the diagnosis. The reality is, mental illness is no different than physical illness. The emotional and psychological aspects of mental illness make supportive friends and family even more important to a person's recovery. Help by being there and offering your reassurance, companionship, emotional strength, and acceptance. You can make a difference just by understanding and helping your friend throughout the course of his or her illness and beyond. (www.whatadifference.org)

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Mental Illness: Myths and Facts

Mental illness is very common. They are also widely misunderstood. People with mental illnesses are frequently stigmatized by others who think it's an uncommon condition. The truth is, mental illness can happen to anybody.

Arm yourself with the facts, then use your knowledge to educate others and reach out to those around you with mental illness. Understanding and support are powerful, and they can make a real difference in the life of a person who needs them.

Myth: There's no hope for people with mental illness.

Fact: There are more treatment, services, and community support systems than ever before, and more are in the works. People with mental illnesses lead active, productive lives.

Myth: I can't do anything for a person with mental illness.

Fact: You can do a lot, starting with how you act and speak. You can create an environment that builds on people's strengths and promotes understanding. For example:

Don't label people with words like "crazy," "wacko," or "loony" or define them by their diagnosis. Instead of saying someone is "a schizophrenic," say he or she "has schizophrenia." Don't say "a schizophrenic person," say "a person with schizophrenia." This is called "people-first" language, and it's important to make a distinction between the person and the illness.

Myth: People with mental illness are violent and unpredictable.

Fact: Actually, the vast majority of people with mental health conditions are no more violent than anyone else. People with mental illnesses are much more likely to be the victims of crime. You probably know someone with a mental illness and don't even realize it.

Myth: Mental illness doesn't affect me.

Fact: Mental illnesses are surprisingly common; they affect almost every family in America.

Myth: Mental illness is the same as mental retardation.

Fact: These are different conditions. Mental retardation is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and difficulties with certain daily living skills. In contrast, people with mental illnesses - health conditions that cause changes in a person's thinking, mood, and behavior - have varied intellectual functioning, just like the general population.

Myth: Mental illnesses are brought on by a weakness of character.

Fact: Mental illnesses are a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.

Myth: People with mental illnesses cannot tolerate the stress of holding down a job.

Fact: All jobs are stressful to some extent. Anybody is more productive when there's a good match between the employee's needs and the working conditions, whether or not the worker has a mental health problem.

Myth: Once people develop mental illnesses, they will never recover.

Fact: Studies show that most people with mental illnesses get better, and many recover completely. Recovery refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms. Science has shown that hope plays an integral role in an individual's recovery.

www.whatadifference.org

SCIP CAN HELP! Please remember that SCIP referrals can obtain mental/behavioral health screenings/evaluations at no charge. This can be a helpful tool to offer parents when they don't know where to begin the process to determine what is going on with their youth.