



Youth Mental Health:

How Adults Can Prevent, Recognize and Intervene with Mental Disorders



Mental disorders: More common than you think

Mental disorders are mental health conditions with abnormalities in our ability to effectively think, act and share emotions.

- **1 in 5** youth ages 9 to 17 has a mental disorder that causes some degree of impairment.
- **Only 1/3** of these adolescents has received necessary treatment.
- **1 in 10** adolescents has a disorder that causes significant impairment.
- Suicide is the **second leading cause of death** in young people ages 15 to 24.

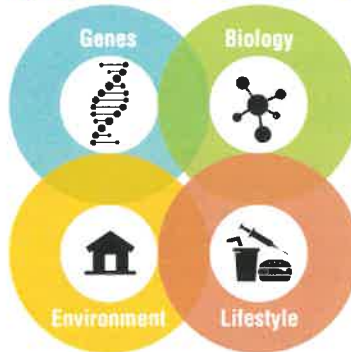
(CDC, 2020)

What is mental health:

emotional, psychological and social well-being

- It affects how we think, feel and act.
- It is the interaction among genes, environment, biology and lifestyle.
- It impacts how we cope with life events, interact with others and make life choices.
- Remember that this is an American culture's interpretation of mental health.

(Gopalkrishnan, 2018; Mental Health, 2019)



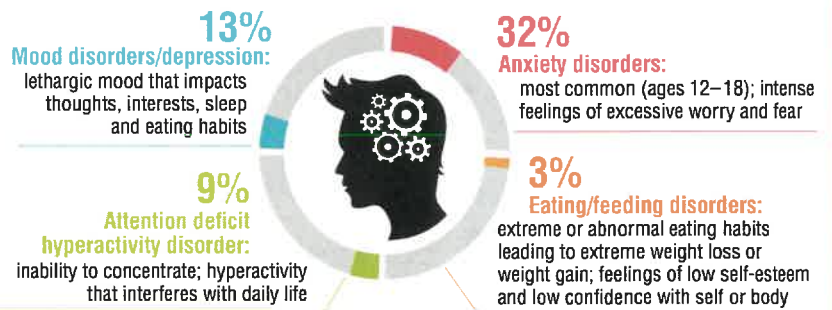
Risk factors for youth

Here are a few factors that put youth more at risk for developing a mental disorder:

- Bullying/cyberbullying and social exclusion
- Gender differences/gender identity issues
- Issues with sleeping
- Low self-esteem
- Fluctuating hormones (puberty)
- Trauma
- High-stress environmental factors such as poverty, unsafe living conditions or family conflict

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009)

Common mental disorders in youth



(U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019)

Cultural considerations

- The definition of mental health and diagnosis of mental disorders may differ across cultures, races, ethnicities, families, personal identities, etc.
- Accessibility to mental health services is vastly different across cultures and communities.
- Never assume someone has a similar view of mental health. If you are unsure, ask what mental health means to that person.
- Consider cultural differences when observing mental health concerns. Is the behavior considered normal in another culture?
- **Always be culturally aware.** You do not need to learn every culture, but be empathetic to the idea that every culture is different while celebrating diversity.

(Gopalkrishnan, 2018)

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Warning signs to look for

Consider the youth's life holistically before assuming these warning signs are due to a mental disorder.

- ✗ Sleeping too much or not enough
- ✗ Extreme weight gain or weight loss
- ✗ Irritable or detached mood for a majority of the day
- ✗ Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness
- ✗ Avoidance of social situations and withdrawing
- ✗ Use of drugs or alcohol
- ✗ Extremely low self-concept and self-esteem



(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012)

NDSU EXTENSION



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Normal vs. abnormal emotional development

While some things youth say or do might seem "abnormal" to adults, many are considered part of normal emotional development.

"Normal" behaviors: increased expression of emotions, spending less time with family, concerns about body image, high personal expectations, regression of behavior for days at a time, expressing interest in opposite sex (or same sex), testing parental rules/limits, contemplation of experimentation with drugs/alcohol

"Abnormal" behaviors: unhealthy coping strategies (self-harm, induced vomiting, suppressing emotions, hurting others), excessive and constant moodiness, extreme behaviors and emotions, any of the warning signs lasting a majority of the time and consistent across contexts and situations

If your youth exhibits behaviors that are considered abnormal, contact a mental health specialist for more assistance.

(Mental Health America, n.d.)

