

Whatever the cause, a student with a mental health issue is not to blame for their difficulties. They cannot "just stop" the problem when they want to.

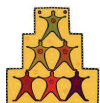


Getting help early is important

Without the right help, children and adolescents with mental health issues are at a higher risk to develop other difficulties, such as **school failure or drop-out, problematic behavior, and even suicide.** Schools are often the first to notice concerning signs and symptoms in the students in their care. Identifying problems early and getting appropriate treatment can help children reach their full potential and may prevent more significant problems from developing. Getting help early is important. It may even save a life!

Help is available

Each school in Chittenden County has its own protocols for helping students access mental health resources when concerns develop. Be familiar with your school's protocols and process for linking students with appropriate mental health resources when you suspect they may need it. Engage parents/guardians as soon as you suspect a problem may be developing. If you are uncertain where else to turn when you have concerns about one of your students, seek guidance from your school's counselor, psychologist, or social worker as soon as you have concerns.



An Information Booklet for Chittenden County School Personnel



CHILDREN & MENTAL HEALTH



What is mental health?

Everyone has mental health. Mental health is how we think, feel and act as we face the daily ups and downs of our lives. Our mental health helps determine how we cope with stress and change, make choices and decisions, and relate with other people.



All people feel sad, angry, worried, and out of control at times. This is a normal part of life. Sometimes, however, a person's thoughts, feelings, or behavior become too hard for them to manage and get in the way of their ability to cope with the every day demands of home, school, and/or relationships. This may be a sign of an emerging mental health concern. Mental health problems can affect people of any age, from early childhood throughout the life cycle.

Mental health problems in children and adolescents are more common than most people think. In the United States, it is estimated that one in five children and adolescents has some mental health related issue.

Some warning signs

Though mental health problems are not always easy to see in children and adolescents, there are some signs and symptoms you can be on the lookout for.

Thinking

- Persistent nightmares
- Unusual thoughts or beliefs
- Thoughts that race too fast
- Poor concentration
- Inability to focus attention
- Hearing of voices that cannot be explained
- Suicidal thoughts

Feelings

- Feelings of sadness or hopelessness
- Angry feelings
- Anxious or worried feelings
- Extreme fear
- Sense of worthlessness and guilt
- Sense of agitation and uneasiness
- Feelings that life is too hard or has no meaning

It is important to note that many of these signs and symptoms **may occur as part of a child and/or adolescent's normal development.** If you are not certain if you should seek help for your student, contact your school counselor, psychologist, or social worker for guidance.

Behavior

- Decrease in school performance
- Loss of interest or effort in things he or she usually enjoys
- Unexplained changes in sleeping, and/or eating habits
- Frequent crying and overreaction to small things
- Avoidance of friends or family
- Hyperactivity or frequent fidgeting
- Frequent breaking of rules and/or getting in trouble with the law
- Use of alcohol or other drugs
- Threats of hurting him or herself or other people
- Lack of remorse or guilt when others are hurt
- Dangerous or life threatening actions
- Cruelty to animals
- Fire setting