

# Children's Mental Health Matters!

a Maryland public awareness campaign

Facts For Families

## When to Seek Help

### When do I Seek Help for my child?

Mental Health, also known as emotional or behavioral health, is a vital part of your child's overall health and development. All children experience periods of anger, frustration and sadness. However, for some children, these normal stresses can be overwhelming to the point that it interferes with the child's everyday life; such as:

- Having difficulty at home, in school, interpersonally or within the family
- Having difficulties affecting his/her ability to eat or sleep
- Having a hard time in situations where they used to be okay
- Experiencing problems significant enough that they are causing the child or other family members distress

Families often wonder if what their child is experiencing or how they are behaving are typical states of development. When trying to separate what is "normal" from what is not, consider several things:

- How long has the behavior or emotion been going on: days, weeks, or months?
- How frequently does the behavior or emotion occur: several times a day, once a day, once a week?
- How intense is the behavior: annoying, upsetting, or very disruptive?
- Has there been a traumatic event in the child's life, such as a death, accident, illness, or changes with the family?

There are a few signs, as your child grows, that may indicate the need to seek help from a mental health professional.

Examples are:

### In Younger Children

- Intense anxiety with separation from caregiver
- Marked decline in school performance
- Poor grades in school despite trying very hard
- Severe worry, fear, or anxiety—regular refusal to go to school, go to sleep, or take part in activities that are normal for the child's age
- Hyperactivity; fidgeting; constant movement beyond regular playing
- Persistent nightmares
- Persistent disobedience or aggression provocative opposition to authority figures
- Frequent, unexplainable temper tantrums

### In Pre-teens or Teenagers

- Marked fall in school performance
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Marked changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Frequent physical complaints
- Sexual acting out
- Depression shown by sustained, prolonged negative mood and attitude, difficulty sleeping, or thoughts of death
- Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs
- Intense fear of becoming obese with no relationship to actual body weight
- Persistent nightmares
- Threats of self-harm or harm to others
- Self-injury or self destructive behavior

Children's  
Mental  
Health  
Matters.org  
A MARYLAND PUBLIC  
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

coordinated by

mhamd   
MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND

MCF  
maryland coalition of families

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- Frequent outbursts of anger, aggression
- Frequent threats to run away
- Aggressive or non-aggressive consistent violation of rights of others; opposition to authority, truancy, theft, or vandalism
- Strange thoughts, beliefs, feelings, or unusual behaviors

### **The Bottom Line—Trust Your Gut!**

You know your child better than anyone. If you think there is a problem, trust your instincts and seek help. You can talk with your pediatrician or family doctor. You will be glad you did.

### **Talk to Your Pediatrician or Child's Doctor**

Maryland Behavioral Health Integration in Pediatric Primary Care (B-HIPP) aims to support the efforts of primary care providers (PCPs), including pediatricians, family physicians, nurse practitioners and physician's assistants, in assessing and managing mental health concerns in their patients from infancy through the transition to young-adulthood. B-HIPP consultation services are available to all pediatric PCPs throughout Maryland.

*Much of this Fact Sheet is adapted from the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, "Facts for Families" and from Dr. Robert Franks, Connecticut Center for Effective Practice, [kidsmentalhealthinfo.com](http://kidsmentalhealthinfo.com)*

MHAMd ~ 443-901-1550 ~ [www.mhamd.org](http://www.mhamd.org)

MCF ~ 410-730-8267 ~ [www.mdcoalition.org](http://www.mdcoalition.org)

The Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign is a collaboration of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMd) and the Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) with support from the Maryland Department of Health - Behavioral Health Administration. The Campaign goal, with School and Community Champions across the state, is to raise public awareness of the importance of children's mental health. For more information, please visit [www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org](http://www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org)