

Children and Mental Health

Kamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury

Clinical Psychologist

Lecturer, Dept. of Clinical Psychology, D.U.

Mental health can be defined as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. In other words mental health is how people think, feel, and act as they face life's situations. It affects how people handle stress, relate to one another, and make decisions. Mental health influences the ways individuals look at themselves, their lives, and others in their lives. Like physical health, mental health is important at every stage of life.

All aspects of our lives are affected by our mental health. Caring for and protecting our children is an obligation and is critical to their daily lives and their independence.

Children and adolescents Can Have Serious Mental Health Problems

Some might wonder whether children can have mental health problems as can be seen in adults. The fact is like adults; children and adolescents can have mental health disorders that interfere with the way they think, feel, and act. These disorders can range from mild to moderate in terms of severity. When untreated, mental health disorders can lead to school failure, family conflicts, drug abuse, violence, and even suicide. Untreated mental health disorders can be very costly to families, communities, and the health care system.

Mental health disorders are more common in young people than many realize. Studies conducted in developed countries show that at least one in five children and adolescents have a mental health disorder. At least one in 10, or about 6 million people, has a serious emotional disturbance.

The Causes Are Complicated

Mental health disorders in children and adolescents are caused mostly by biology and environment. Examples of biological causes are genetics, chemical imbalances in the body, or damage to the central nervous system, such as a head injury. Many environmental factors also put young people at risk for developing mental health disorders. Examples include:

- Exposure to environmental toxins, such as high levels of lead;
- Exposure to violence, such as witnessing or being the victim of physical or sexual abuse, drive-by shootings, muggings, or other disasters;
- Stress related to chronic poverty, discrimination, or other serious hardships; and
- The loss of important people through death, divorce, or broken relationships.

Signs of Mental Health Disorders Can Signal a Need for Help

Children and adolescents with mental health issues need to get help as soon as possible in children or adolescents. Pay attention if a child or adolescent you know has any of these warning signs:

A Child or Adolescent is Troubled by Feeling:

- Sad and hopeless for no reason, and these feelings do not go away.
- Very angry most of the time and crying a lot or overreacting to things.
- Worthless or guilty often.
- Anxious or worried often.
- Unable to get over a loss of someone important.
- Extremely fearful or having unexplained fears.
- Constantly concerned about physical problems or physical appearance.
- Frightened that his or her mind either is controlled or is out of control.

A Child or adolescent experiences big Changes, such as:

- Showing declining performance in school.
- Losing interest in things once enjoyed.
- Experiencing unexplained changes in sleeping or eating patterns.
- Avoiding friends or family and wanting to be alone all the time.
- Daydreaming too much and not completing tasks.
- Feeling life is too hard to handle.
- Hearing voices that cannot be explained.
- Experiencing suicidal thoughts.

A child or adolescent experiences:

- Poor concentration and is unable to think straight or make up or her mind.
- An inability to sit still or focus attention.
- Worry about being harmed, hurting others, or doing something "bad".
- A need to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines hundreds of times a day, in order to avoid an unsubstantiated danger.
- Racing thoughts that are almost too fast to follow.
- Persistent nightmares.

A child or adolescent behaves in ways that cause problems, such as:

- Using alcohol or other drugs.
- Eating large amounts of food and then purging, or abusing laxatives, to avoid weight gain.
- Dieting and/or exercising obsessively.
- Violating the rights of others or constantly breaking the law without regard for other people.
- Setting fires.
- Doing things that can be life threatening.
- Killing animals.

What to do when you think your child is suffering from mental health problems:

If you have noticed any of these warning signs in your child which is interfering with his or her normal functioning in a number of areas such as schooling, social interaction etc. then it is time to consult with

a mental health professional, who can either be a clinical psychologist or a child psychiatrist. There are mainly two treatment choices. One is drug therapy usually prescribed by a child psychiatrist. The other is psychotherapy e.g. behaviour therapy, family therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy etc., usually offered by a clinical psychologist.

Important Messages About Child and Adolescent Mental Health:

- Every child's mental health is important.
- Many children have mental health problems.
- These problems are real, painful, and can be severe.
- Mental health problems can be recognized and treated.
- Caring families and communities working together can help.

Source: Internet

About writer

Kamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, Clinical Psychologist & Lecturer, Department of Clinical Psychology, Dhaka University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. He achieved his MSc and M.Phil degree from the same department.

‘সঠিক সময়ে ADHD-এর চিকিৎসা না হলে
শিশুর মধ্যে মাদকাসক্তি, স্কুলে
অকৃতকার্যতা, আচরণগত সমস্যা এবং
পরবর্তীতে চাকুরি ক্ষেত্রে অকৃতকার্যতা,
পেশাগত ও বৈবাহিক সমস্যা হওয়ার
সম্ভাবনা বেশি বাড়ে।’

Source : A Global Mental Health Education Program of WFMH