Warning Signs of Mental Illness in Children/Adolescents

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Identify

- At least 5 warning signs of mental illness in children
- Why it is important to treat a child with mental illness earlier rather than later
- At least 2 treatment options
Mental Illness Defined

According to the NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness):

• “A mental illness is a condition that impacts a person’s thinking, feeling or mood and may affect his or her ability to relate to others and function on a daily basis.”
Stigma of Mental Illness

- Child will be “labeled”
- You are a “bad parent” if your child has a mental illness
- Medication can make things worse
- Unable to get a job/work/succeed in school
The Truth

- 50% drop out of high school
- 1 in 2 juveniles incarcerated have an undiagnosed mental illness
- Untreated children are twice as likely to abuse drugs and alcohol
- 1 in 7 TX Hispanic high school students report having made a suicide plan
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death in ages 15-24 and 3rd leading cause for ages 10-14.

www.1in5minds.org and www.cdc.gov
Just Think…

- What’s the effect of not taking any action?
- Will the situation grow worse?
- Could not seeking treatment jeopardize the chance of a bright future?
- Earlier treatment can be more effective.
1 in 5 Children Will Be Diagnosed with a Mental, Emotional or Behavioral Disorder
98,000 children in Bexar County alone will need help and 80% will never receive the treatment they need and deserve.
Prevalence of Mental Illness

- 1 in 5 children in the US have a mental illness

- Yet only 1 in 5 of those children with a mental illness actually receive treatment
Pediatricians and Mental Health

- 50% of mental health conditions begin by age 14

- 75% develop by age 24- (NAMI)

- Pediatricians and Primary Care Physicians are now treating children’s mental health
What are Warning Signs?

- Significant behavior change
- Behaviors are not age or developmentally appropriate
- Repeated behaviors or events
- Drastic change in mood
Warning Signs of Suicide

- Talking about suicide/death
- Feelings of hopelessness/helplessness/being trapped
- That intolerable pain will never end
- Being bullied
Mood Changes

- Overwhelming sadness; cries a lot
- Extreme fear
- Excessive worry about being harmed, hurting others, or doing something “bad”
- No longer enjoys things they used to
- Extreme moods or mood swings
- Angry most of the time/extreme anger
Behavior Changes

- Avoids friends/family
- Extreme hyperactivity
- Impulsive
- Changes in eating pattern
- Changes in sleeping pattern
- Persistent nightmares
- Excessively cleaning, counting, checking
- Risk-taking behavior
- Fire starting
- Animal cruelty
Thought Changes

- Hears voices (external)
- Mind races
- Delusions
- Peculiar behavior or thinking
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Difficulty problem solving
- Inability to make decisions
School Changes

- School refusal
- Sudden decline in grades
- Problem behaviors in school
- Loss of interest in friends
- Loss of interest in extracurricular activities
Other Concerns

• Inability to cope with daily activities or responsibilities
• Increased use of drugs or alcohol
• Somatic complaints
• Desire to harm or kill self/others
• Unexplained cuts, bruises, injuries
Self-inflicted cuts

Notice the old wounds along with new ones. Same type of injury. Repetative in nature.
Wounds can be easily hidden
Mental Illness AS a Warning Sign

- Being bullied
- Abuse - Physical, Sexual, Emotional
- Neglect
- Grief – (death, divorce)
- Terrorism
Warning Signs
Children vs. Adolescents

Adolescents
• Suicidal thoughts
• Social withdrawal
• Extremes in moods, anger
• Inability to cope with problems or ADL’s
• Substance abuse
• Delusions, psychosis, paranoia
• Risky behaviors

Children
• School performance issues
• Severe hyperactivity
• Changes in sleeping/eating
• Persistent nightmares
• Frequent fighting
• Extreme disobedience or aggression
• Excessive worry
• Somatic complaints
Warning Signs are Different

• Look at warning signs as a whole
• You know your child best
• Not developmentally, contextually or age appropriate
• Causes serious problems in his/her ability to study, work, or relate to others
• Early intervention can help reduce severity of illness
Talking with your child about concerns:

- Try not to interrupt
- Say what you mean
- Listen, speak calmly, don’t make assumptions
- Avoid threats
- If things get heated, take a break
- Remember what it was like to be a kid
How clinicians look at symptoms

- Thought disorders, mood disorders, and personality disorders
- Symptoms/behaviors in context
- Severity of symptoms
- A diagnosis is important for insurance and for clinicians/psychiatrists to treat
Common Mental Illnesses

- Anxiety or Depression
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Eating Disorders
- Schizophrenia or Psychosis
Case Studies

- Listen to the warning signs in each study.
- Does the child engage in or show concerning behaviors?
- Are these behaviors affecting their ability to function?
this is mary
Mary

- What were some warning signs?
- Are these behaviors affecting her ability to cope with life?
- What do you think could happen if no treatment was sought?
Mary’s Warning Signs:

- Stopped hanging out with her friends/family
- Drop in grades
- Lack of interest in things she used to do
- Change in sleep habits
- Felt worthless and hopeless about the future
- Wished she was dead
David

- What were some warning signs?
- Are these behaviors affecting his ability to cope with life?
- What do you think could happen if no treatment was sought?
David’s Warning Signs

- Excessively anxious
- Inability to focus attention or sit still
- Worried about doing something “bad”
- Racing Thoughts
- Inability to Sleep
- Somatization (emotions causing physical problems)
this is jennifer
Jennifer

- What were some warning signs?
- Are these behaviors affecting her ability to cope with life?
- What do you think could happen if no treatment was sought?
Jennifer’s Warning Signs

- Difficulty concentrating in school
- Drop in grades
- Isolating from friends
- Emotional over-reaction
- Self-injury
What to do if you are concerned:

• Suicidal/Homicidal thoughts or attempts require immediate attention. Call 911.

• If in distress but not in crisis, they will need to be assessed by a clinician for the appropriate level of care and referrals.

• If in treatment, but not improving, talk with the therapist/psychiatrist about your concerns.
Treatment Options/Levels of Care

- Outpatient
- Partial Hospitalization or Day Treatment
- Residential Treatment
- Observation
- Inpatient Hospitalization
How to Cope

• Seek treatment for your child (therapy, psychiatry, etc.)
• Accept your feelings
• Seek out support (family therapy, group therapy, church, friends, etc.)
• Practice self care
What Else Can I Do to Help My Child?

- Become part of the treatment team
- Be open to all solutions
- Stay calm
- Ask questions. Educate yourself.
- Remove danger
- Reassure your child you love them
Resources

- www.1in5minds.org
- www.claritycgc.org
- www.nami.org
- www.cdc.gov
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
  - 1-800-273-TALK or www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org