

FAMILY HANDBOOK

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.



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.

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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
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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.

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 child, contact your child's healthcare provider or school counselor for guidance.

What causes mental health problems?

The causes of mental health problems are complicated and not yet fully understood. It is known, however, that mental health issues may come from a combination of different factors including a person's biology (e.g. genetics, chemical imbalances in the body) and from environmental factors (e.g. stressful or harmful experiences, exposure to harmful chemicals.)

Whatever the cause, a person 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. 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!

Where do I go to get mental health support?

There are many places you can go to get assistance with and/or advice about the mental health of your child. Talking with your child's pediatrician or school counselor is a good place to start. You may also talk with a therapist whose job it is to understand and provide support with mental health issues. If you are not sure where to start, ask someone you trust – perhaps a friend or family member, your child's teacher, healthcare provider or a member of the clergy – to help you get connected with the resources your child may need.

What can I expect?

When you first seek mental health support or advice, you will likely be asked to set up a meeting to discuss your concerns and what changes you have noticed in your child's thinking, feelings, and/or behavior. As a parent, you know your child better than anyone. Because of this, your input is very important in developing the best mental health care plan for your child. You can expect to be included in all decisions regarding your child and the development of their mental health care plan.

Getting the right support for your child is not always easy. Despite the challenges you may face, getting help for mental health issues is really important!

Did you know:

- Health Insurance may cover the cost of child and/or family mental health services.
- Many mental health providers will adjust their fees based on a family's ability to pay.
- In the Brockton Public Schools, adjustment counselors are available to support students.
- Some community based mental health providers in the Brockton area will provide services in your home.
- Interpreters are available for families who do not speak English.



Help is available

Call your child's physician or school counselor for names of local mental health providers.

Call the Behavioral Health number on the back of your insurance card to request a list of the mental health providers in your area or use your computer to visit your insurers website for a personalized list of providers.

Call the local Department of Mental Health (DMH) office at (508) 897-2000 and speak with an Intake and Referral Specialist for information about DMH eligibility or a referral to a community based agency.

Call (508) 947-8779 or visit BAMSIS Parent Information Network at www.bamsi.org/services/pin.html to be linked with a parent support group or advocate who can help you find the right resources for your child.

If you are insured with MassHealth/Mass Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP), you may be eligible for intensive community based support services available through the *Children's Behavioral Health Initiative* (CBHI). Call the BAMSIS Community Service Agency at (508) 587-2579 x30 for more information about these services.

