



## WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. Helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. If you experience mental health problems, your thinking, mood, and behavior could be affected. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- Family history of mental health problems

Mental health problems are common but help is available. People with mental health problems can get better and many recover completely.

## Early Warning Signs

Experiencing one or more of the following feelings or behaviors can be an early warning sign of a problem:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and usual activities
- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters

## Warning Signs for Mental Health Disorders in Adolescents

Mental health disorders are detectable by changes in thinking, mood, and/or behavior that lessen a person's daily ability to function and vary depending on the specific mental health challenge. Many teens experience mood swings; however, when symptoms cause major emotional distress or greatly interfere with daily life and social interactions, a professional evaluation is a beneficial first step towards recovery. "Red flags" of mental disorders in teens:

1. Persistent irritability
2. Persistent anger
3. Persistent social withdrawal
4. Major changes in appetite and/or weight
5. Major changes in sleep such as excessive sleeping or insomnia
6. Major loss of self-esteem
7. Loss of interest in favorite pastimes
8. Unexpected and/or dramatic decline in performance at school
9. Persistent personality shifts such as aggressiveness, excess anger, and/or excess weepiness
10. Persistent expressions of hopelessness

## Myths and Facts

**Myth: There's no hope for people with mental illnesses.**

**Fact:** People with mental illnesses lead active, productive lives. There are treatment, supports groups and counseling to help you through.

**Myth: I can't do anything for someone with mental health needs.**

**Fact:** Educate yourself and others about mental health and speak and behave in a way that shows sensitivity to those struggling with mental health issues.

**Myth: People with mental illnesses are violent and unpredictable.**

**Fact:** In reality, the vast majority of people who have mental health needs are no more violent than anyone else. You probably know someone with a mental illness and don't even realize it.

**Myth: Mental illnesses are brought on by a weakness of character.**

**Fact:** Mental illnesses are a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors. Genetic and biological factors are associated with schizophrenia, depression, and alcoholism. Social influences, such as loss of a loved one or a job, can also contribute to the development of various disorders.

**Myth: Once people develop mental illnesses, they will never recover.**

**Fact:** Studies show that most people with mental illnesses get better, and many recover completely. Recovery refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms.

**Myth: Children do not experience mental illnesses. Their actions are just products of bad parenting.**

**Fact:** A report from the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health showed that in any given year 5-9 percent of children experience serious emotional disturbances. Just like adult mental illnesses, these are clinically diagnosable health conditions that are a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, social, and sometimes even genetic factors.

**Do not stay suffering. Should you notice these warning signs, call your Barnabas Health Employee Assistance Program. We are here to help you get through the stressors of life. 1-800-300-0628**