

# Mental Health Information For Teens, Fifth Edition



**Teen Health Series**

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# **Mental Health Information For Teens, Fifth Edition**

Health Tips About Mental Wellness  
And Mental Illness

Including Facts About Recognizing And  
Treating Mood, Anxiety, Personality, Psychotic,  
Behavioral, Impulse Control, And Addiction Disorders



**OMNIGRAPHICS**

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## Chapter 1

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# Understanding Mental Health

Most of us feel sad, lonely, or anxious at times. That’s just human. But sometimes people feel so sad, hopeless, worried, or worthless that they don’t want to do things like get out of bed or go to school. These feelings can be signs that you need help for a mental health problem. Depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and other mental health issues can be treated. If you think you have a problem, talk to an adult you trust.

Talk to your parents or a trusted adult if you:

- Can’t eat or sleep
- Can’t do regular tasks like going to school
- Don’t want to do things you used to enjoy
- Don’t want to hang out with your friends or family
- Feel like you can’t control your feelings and it’s hurting your relationships
- Have low energy or no energy
- Feel hopeless
- Feel numb or like nothing matters

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About This Chapter: Text in this chapter begins with excerpts from “Could I Have A Mental Health Problem?” [girlshealth.gov](http://girlshealth.gov), Office on Women’s Health (OWH), January 7, 2015; Text beginning with the heading “What Is Mental Health?” is excerpted from “What Is Mental Health?” [MentalHealth.gov](http://MentalHealth.gov), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), May 31, 2013. Reviewed July 2017; Text under the heading “Impact Of Mental Health Disorders” is excerpted from “Module 3—Understanding Mental Disorders, Treatment, And Recovery,” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), February 9, 2010. Reviewed July 2017; Text under the heading “Mental Health Myths And Facts” is excerpted from “Mental Health Myths And Facts,” [MentalHealth.gov](http://MentalHealth.gov), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), May 31, 2013. Reviewed July 2017.

- Can't stop thinking about certain things or memories
- Often feel confused or forgetful
- Feel edgy, angry, upset, worried, or scared a lot
- Want to harm yourself or others
- Can't stop yourself from dieting or exercising a lot
- Have aches and pains that don't have a clear cause
- Hear voices
- Feel very sad for months after a loss or death
- Feel like your mind is being controlled or is out of control

## What Is Mental Health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also 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.

Over the course of your life, 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.

## Mental Health And Wellness

Positive mental health allows people to:

- Realize their full potential
- Cope with the stresses of life
- Work productively
- Make meaningful contributions to their communities

Ways to maintain positive mental health include:

- Getting professional help if you need it
- Connecting with others
- Staying positive
- Getting physically active
- Helping others
- Getting enough sleep
- Developing coping skills

## Early Warning Signs Of Mental Illnesses

Not sure if you or someone you know is living with mental health problems? 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
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

### You Are Not Alone

1/2 of teens have a mental health disorder at some point, according to a national survey. You can feel better! Mental health problems can be treated. Get help if you need it.

## Impact Of Mental Health Disorders

- Thought processes, moods and emotions are affected by mental disorders.
- Mental disorders are biologically based.
- What matters most is the life impact.
- Disorders can be more, or less, serious, and may change over time.
- Cause is less important than current impact.
- Violence is not associated with all disorders.

Parent-reported information from the 2011-12 National Survey of Children's Health showed that 1 out of 7 U.S. children aged 2 to 8 years had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder (MBDD). Many family, community, and healthcare factors were related to the children having MBDDs.

- Children with the following characteristics were more likely to have a MBDD:
  - Boys
  - Children age 6 to 8 years
  - Non-Hispanic white children
- Children were more likely to have a MBDD if they were from:
  - Poor families (those living at less than 100% of the federal poverty level) and
  - Families that spoke English in the home

*(Source: "Children's Mental Health," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).)*

## Mental Health Myths And Facts

Can you tell the difference between a mental health myth and fact? Learn the truth about the most common mental health myths.

## Mental Health Problems Affect Everyone

**Myth:** Mental health problems don't affect me.

**Fact:** Mental health problems are actually very common. In 2014, about:

- One in five American adults experienced a mental health issue
- One in 10 young people experienced a period of major depression
- One in 25 Americans lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. It accounts for the loss of more than 41,000 American lives each year, more than double the number of lives lost to homicide.

**Myth:** Children don't experience mental health problems.

**Fact:** Even very young children may show early warning signs of mental health concerns. These mental health problems are often clinically diagnosable, and can be a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.

Half of all mental health disorders show first signs before a person turns 14 years old, and three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24.

Unfortunately, less than 20 percent of children and adolescents with diagnosable mental health problems receive the treatment they need. Early mental health support can help a child before problems interfere with other developmental needs.

**Myth:** People with mental health problems are violent and unpredictable.

**Fact:** The vast majority of people with mental health problems are no more likely to be violent than anyone else. Most people with mental illness are not violent and only 3–5 percent of violent acts can be attributed to individuals living with a serious mental illness. In fact, people with severe mental illnesses are over 10 times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population. You probably know someone with a mental health problem and don't even realize it, because many people with mental health problems are highly active and productive members of our communities.

**Myth:** People with mental health needs, even those who are managing their mental illness, cannot tolerate the stress of holding down a job.

**Fact:** People with mental health problems are just as productive as other employees. Employers who hire people with mental health problems report good attendance and

punctuality as well as motivation, good work, and job tenure on par with or greater than other employees.

When employees with mental health problems receive effective treatment, it can result in:

- Lower total medical costs
- Increased productivity
- Lower absenteeism
- Decreased disability costs

**Myth:** Personality weakness or character flaws cause mental health problems. People with mental health problems can snap out of it if they try hard enough.

**Fact:** Mental health problems have nothing to do with being lazy or weak and many people need help to get better. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:

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

People with mental health problems can get better and many recover completely.

### Helping Individuals With Mental Health Problems

**Myth:** There is no hope for people with mental health problems. Once a friend or family member develops mental health problems, he or she will never recover.

**Fact:** Studies show that people with mental health problems 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. There are more treatments, services, and community support systems than ever before, and they work.

**Myth:** Therapy and self-help are a waste of time. Why bother when you can just take a pill?

**Fact:** Treatment for mental health problems varies depending on the individual and could include medication, therapy, or both. Many individuals work with a support system during the healing and recovery process.

**Myth:** I can't do anything for a person with a mental health problem.

**Fact:** Friends and loved ones can make a big difference. Only 44 percent of adults with diagnosable mental health problems and less than 20 percent of children and adolescents receive needed treatment. Friends and family can be important influences to help someone get the treatment and services they need by:

- Reaching out and letting them know you are available to help
- Helping them access mental health services
- Learning and sharing the facts about mental health, especially if you hear something that isn't true
- Treating them with respect, just as you would anyone else
- Refusing to define them by their diagnosis or using labels such as “crazy”

**Myth:** Prevention doesn't work. It is impossible to prevent mental illnesses.

**Fact:** Prevention of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders focuses on addressing known risk factors such as exposure to trauma that can affect the chances that children, youth, and young adults will develop mental health problems. Promoting the social-emotional well-being of children and youth leads to:

- Higher overall productivity
- Better educational outcomes
- Lower crime rates
- Stronger economies
- Lower healthcare costs
- Improved quality of life
- Increased lifespan
- Improved family life

### Online Info

Websites and other online resources sometimes offer great support and tools for mental health. Sometimes, though, they actually promote poor habits. Your best bet is to work with an adult or ask your doctor about any online info.

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Lots of help is available if you are having mental health problems. You can learn about therapy, and you can find a therapist near you. You can text for help with problems and contact a hotline if you're thinking about suicide. Your life can get so much better!

Teens who have faced mental health problems are connecting with each other through photos, videos, and more on OK2TALK ([www.ok2talk.org](http://www.ok2talk.org)). Read about their experiences and their stories of hope, strength, and recovery.