



Signs and Symptoms of Youth Mental Illness

Behaviors

- Withdrawal from others
- Loss of interest in personal appearance/ previously enjoyed activities
- Loss of motivation/ falling grades
- Excessive worry about grades; perfectionism
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Obsessive or compulsive behavior
- Repetitive play that reenacts a traumatic event
- Clinging to a teacher or classmate
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Deceitfulness, theft, property destruction
- Avoidance or phobic behavior
- Talking rapidly
- Non-compliance
- Frequent absences from school
- Hypervigilance

Thoughts

- Frequent self-criticism or self-blame
- Pessimism
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Indecisiveness or confusion
- Rigid thinking
- Racing thoughts
- Tendency to believe others see one in a negative light
- Delusions or hallucinations
- Thoughts of death and suicide

Physical

- Cardiovascular: pounding heart, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, blushing
- Respiratory: fast breathing, shortness of breath
- Neurological: dizziness, headache, sweating, tingling, numbness
- Gastrointestinal: choking, dry mouth, stomach pains, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Musculoskeletal: muscle aches and pains, restlessness, tremors and shaking, inability to relax
- Changes in normal patterns: overeating or not eating at all, sleeping much more or much less
- Changes in hygiene, unkempt
- Eyes bloodshot or glassy
- Weight gain or loss

Emotional

- Depressed mood and/or mood swings
- Unrealistic or excessive anxiety or guilt
- Excessive irritability or anger; defiance
- Lack of inhibition
- Lack of emotion or emotional response
- Helplessness or hopelessness
- Oversensitivity to comments/criticism
- Low self-esteem
- Excessive fear of separating from parents
- Crying spells or emotional outbursts



CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

You may not be aware of the mental health or trauma histories of every student in your classroom. Below are some strategies you can do to make your classroom a safe learning environment for everyone.



Shift from a model that asks, “What is wrong with you?” to one that asks, “What happened to you?”

Create an environment where students feel safe.

- Establish and practice routines for classroom procedures.
- Provide warnings leading up to the transition.



Address basic needs.

- Allow water bottles and snacks in the classroom.
- Encourage physical movement.
- Provide a quiet place to work.



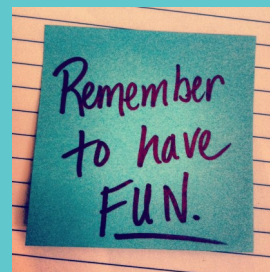
Nurture relationships with students and their families.

- Remember that students’ parents/caregivers may also be trauma survivors.
- Be sensitive to the fact that not all children have a “traditional family.”



COPING SKILLS

- Deep breathing
- Pushing down the wall
- Pressure points
- Weighted items
- Chair sit-ups
- Sensory items
- Fidgets



“Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn to learn.”

-O. Fred Donaldson

Most importantly, TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!

Exposure to others’ trauma can lead to vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue. Identify self-care activities that help you relieve stress (e.g., physical exercise, creative outlets, getting adequate rest). **By taking care of yourself first, you will be in a better position to help others while avoiding burnout.**

