

## **MENTAL ILLNESS: RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNS**

Most people believe that mental disorders are rare and “happen to someone else.” In fact, mental disorders are common and widespread. An estimated 61.5 million Americans experience mental disorder in a given year. One in 17—about 13.6 million—live with a serious mental illness such as major depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 20 percent of youth ages 13 to 18 experience severe mental disorders in a given year. For ages 8 to 15, the estimate is 13 percent.

A mental illness is a disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life’s ordinary demands and routines. It is important to know, with treatment, most people learn to cope and achieve recovery from a mental illness.

### **In adults: (Not all may apply)**

- Confused thinking
- Prolonged depression (sadness or irritability)
- Feelings of extreme highs and lows
- Excessive fears, worries and anxieties
- Social withdrawal
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Strong feelings of anger
- Delusions or hallucinations
- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Denial of obvious problems
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments
- Substance abuse



## In older children and pre-adolescents: (Not all may apply)

- Substance abuse
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Excessive complaints of physical ailments
- Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, and/or vandalism
- Intense fear of weight gain
- Prolonged negative mood, often accompanied by poor appetite or thoughts of death
- Frequent outbursts of anger

## In younger children: (Not all may apply)

- Changes in school performance
- Poor grades despite strong efforts
- Excessive worry or anxiety (i.e. refusing to go to bed or school)
- Hyperactivity
- Persistent nightmares
- Persistent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

*Nami.org/factsheets, 3/2013*

1. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.). *Statistics: Any Disorder among Adults*. Retrieved March 5, 2013, from [http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/1ANYDIS\\_ADULT.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/1ANYDIS_ADULT.shtml)

2. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.). *Any Disorder among Children*. Retrieved March 5, 2013, from [http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/1ANYDIS\\_CHILD.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/1ANYDIS_CHILD.shtml)