

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 schizophrenia¹. 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

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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

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