

Mental Health: Know the Warning Signs



Trying to tell the difference between what expected behaviors are and what might be the signs of a mental health condition isn't always easy. There's no easy test that can let someone know if there is a mental health condition or if actions and thoughts might be typical behaviors of a person or the result of a physical illness.

Each condition has its own set of symptoms but some common signs of mental health conditions in adults and adolescents can include the following.

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable “highs” or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing “aches and pains”)

- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance (mostly in adolescents)

Where to Get Help

Don't be afraid to reach out if you or someone you know needs help. Learning all you can about mental health is an important first step.

Reach out to your health insurance, primary care doctor or state/country mental health authority for more resources.

You can also contact the NAMI HelpLine by calling 1-800-650-NAMI or emailing info@nami.org to find out what services and supports are available in your community.

If you or someone you know needs help now, you should immediately call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or call 911.

Receiving a Diagnosis

Knowing warning signs can help let you know if you need to speak to a professional. For many people, getting an accurate diagnosis is the first step in a treatment plan.

Unlike diabetes or cancer, there is no medical test that can accurately diagnose mental health conditions. A mental health professional uses the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, to assess symptoms and make a diagnosis. The manual lists criteria including feelings and behaviors and time limits in order to be officially classified as a mental health condition.

After diagnosis, a health care provider can help develop a treatment plan that could include medication, therapy or other lifestyle changes.

Mental Health Providers

Clinical social workers are trained to help with individual and family problems, including mental health conditions.

Psychologists are trained in mental health issues. They provide counseling (therapy).

Psychiatrists are medical doctors, so they can prescribe medications. They specialize in mental health conditions.

Finding Treatment

Treatments for mental health conditions vary by diagnosis and by person. Getting a diagnosis is an important first step, knowing your own preferences and goals is also important. There's no "one size fits all" treatment.

In recent years, innovations in treatment options have made living with mental health conditions easier. However, a strong treatment plan goes beyond that. There are many tools that can improve your experience on the road to wellness: medication, counseling (therapy), social support, spiritual practices and education.

Therapy can take many forms, from learning relaxation skills to intensively reworking your thinking patterns.

Social support, acceptance and encouragement from friends, family and the people around you also make a difference.

Education about how to manage a mental health condition can provide you the skills and supports to enrich you and your family's unique journey toward mental health and wellness.

For more information visit www.nami.org/aka