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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Sound mind and body: Screening can help adolescents in need

Just like crying and tantrums are normal behaviors for infants and toddlers, mood swings and secrecy can be signs of a normal adolescent. If those behaviors become extreme, there may be a larger problem.

Mental health disorders are fairly common. One in five children has a diagnosable mental health problem. Half of U.S. adults with mental health disorders had symptoms by age 14.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends mental health screening as a good way to identify potential problems early. Your child's pediatrician can use screening tools to find signs of mental illness, social problems and substance abuse disorders. Screening can be done at check-ups or sick visits. Doctors can screen patients if you ask, or they might refer your child to someone for more help.

The AAP advises families to watch for signs of mental illness in their teenager. Some behaviors may be clues that an adolescent is suffering from a mental health or substance abuse disorder. Seek additional help from your doctor if your child:

- is doing poorly in or is not attending school;
- has behavior problems, such as secrecy, worse communication with parents, irritability, outbursts of anger, wanting to be alone, sadness, anxiety, fighting, causing trouble or acting afraid;
- is sleeping too little or too much;
- is hurting himself or herself (for example, cutting, burning, carving on skin, eating too little or too much or

throwing up after or instead of eating);

- has a lot of headaches, joint, stomach or chest pain;
- or
- is using drugs or alcohol.



Parents should try to talk with their adolescent and listen to what she/he has to say, rather than giving answers or advice on how to solve problems. If parents cannot talk with their adolescent, they should get help from mental health or medical professionals. Schools also can recognize problems and help families find treatment and referral services for students.

Once an adolescent is diagnosed, the AAP supports care that includes counseling and education as well as possible prescription medication. The patient should be involved in decisions about her/his care and get support from his or her family, school, medical doctors and specialists. For more information, visit <http://www.healthychildren.org/english/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/default.aspx>

— Trisha Koriath

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