

## **CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES**

*by:*

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### **Mental Health is important & often misunderstood**

Mental Health is actually how people think, feel and act in their daily activities or as they face life. It is seen as and affects how people handle their challenges or stress, interact with one another, and make decisions.

Mental Health influences the ways the individual look and feel about themselves, their lives and others in their lives. Mental Health is important at every stage of life and the foundations are laid very early in life.

Mental Health is therefore not about going or being MAD as commonly thought of by a large proportion of the society.

### **Children and adolescents can have Mental Health difficulties**

Like adults, children and adolescents can have mental health difficulties that interfere with the way they think, feel, act and function. Most of the mental health difficulties in children:

- Are different from that of adults
- Can be recognized and detected in the early years
- When left untreated, lead to serious consequences and can be severe of adult mental health difficulties. Untreated mental health disorders can be very costly to families, communities and the health care system.

## **Mental Health difficulties in children and adolescents:**

- Refers to the range of difficulties which includes emotional, behavioral, academic and interaction with others
- The causes are complicated:
  - Children are born with the defect / disorder
  - Genetic
  - Exposure to violence, e.g. being a witness or the victim of physical, emotional or sexual abuse and other disasters
  - Stress and life events (chronic poverty, discrimination or other serious hardships; lost of love relationship through death, divorce)

## **Know when your child or their friend(s) may have difficulties:**

- **Academic**
  - Complaints of constant difficulties in reading, writing and/or mathematics
  - Poor grades in school despite trying hard
  - Marked or sudden fall in school performance
- **Behavior**
  - Complaints from teachers of inability or difficulties to keep still in class, constantly leaving their seat, disturbing or talking to others
  - Hyperactivity, restless, unable to keep still unless watching television or on the computer (fidgety)
  - Persistent disobedience, uncooperative or use of aggression to authority figures (teacher, parents)
  - Bullies and use of threats onto others
  - Being frequently bullied by others

- Does not mix or get along with others
- Frequently gets angry and use aggression e.g. throw or hit others
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Lack of energy or motivation
- Lost interest in school or things normally pleasurable for the child
- Excessive eating or throwing away and avoiding food
- Making themselves vomit after eating
- Using drugs and alcohol
- Odd ideas or behaviors e.g. withdrawn, complaints of being and feeling afraid

- **Emotions**

- Expressing a lot of worries, fears and /or anxieties
- Sad face, crying a lot
- Frequent anger outburst
- Complaints of feeling stressful or sad, unhappy
- Complaints of poor sleep, persistent nightmare, feeling tired, inability to concentrate or think well
- Persistent negative thinking of giving up living, running away from home
- Complaints of being touched and feeling uncomfortable about it
- A lot of fears of being fat and regularly skipping meals

Knowing when children need help and getting help early can help resolve the problem(s) and prevents severe and lasting consequences.

## Reactions of the community

There is a general belief that:

- The difficulties in children will “go away” – this is not at all true as studies have shown that in the numerous conditions it remains stable, progressed or worsened
- Seeing a psychiatrist or taking medication will make the child MAD. Again this is not true as seeing a psychiatrist will allow the child to be assessed and management discussed with the family and NOT in all conditions that the child needs medication
- Medications that are used in children especially by Medical Professionals have been researched for years and found to be safe. The Medical Professional too keeps a close watch on impact of children and medication (if they are on any) during the follow-up
- Anyone can diagnose mental health difficulties in children: NOT TRUE, because these condition as MEDICALLY BASED. The diagnosis of the child’s problems SHOULD BE MADE BY A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL. Currently, parents approached many different professions for advice and are given advice that is not supported by medical evidences (researches); this can be dangerous and again has serious consequences on the child and family.

## **Reactions of the PAC Unit**

There is still so much work to be done but with few resources.

## **Important Messages about Child and Adolescent Mental Health:**

Every child's mental health is important and many children have mental health difficulties. These problems are real, painful and can be severe but Mental Health difficulties can and should be recognized and treated early enough.