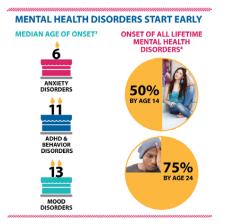# Recognizing When Help is Needed

If your child's thoughts, feelings or behaviors were causing them to struggle, would you know how to talk to them about it? If they came to you looking for help, would you know what to do? You might be surprised to find out that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that as many as 1 in 5 young people under the age of 18 will experience a diagnosable mental health problem in a given year, so it's important to be able to address signs and symptoms early.

All parents strive to do right by their children. Being an aware and engaged parent plays a pivotal role in your child's mental health, and maintaining open and honest communication with your child is one of the best ways to notice when something begins to go amiss. When you are in touch with what is "normal" in your child's life, it becomes clear when changes emerge, like problems with friendships or loss of interest in activities he or she used to get excited about . Encourage your child to talk to you about his or her feelings, and let them know that there is nothing he or she can say or tell you that will stop you from loving him or her. More easily said than done—especially when it comes to teenagers—but telling them out loud (and often) saves them the trouble of worrying about whether or not they can confide in you and how you might react.

Not so different from "the birds and the bees," when the time comes to have a talk with your child about mental health, it may be uncomfortable, but it's too important to avoid. Don't feel like you should wait until something is wrong to start talking. See how much your child knows about mental health—ask them directly, or share with them the story of a friend or relative who has had mental health problems. You may even have your own story to share. If you're sharing a story or experience, avoid judgmental language and focus on the fact that mental health problems are treatable.

One way of identifying mental health problems early is to take an online screen. A screen is a scientific questionnaire used to determine if signs and symptoms indicate risk of a disorder. Mental Health America has a screen for young people ages 11-17, and a corresponding screen for parents of young people, to help identify risk. Since its launch in spring of this year, over 1,200 parent screens have been taken at mhascreening.org. Nearly 63 percent of those screens indicated that a young person was showing signs of risk for a behavioral, emotional or attention disorder.

Just like physical illnesses, treating mental health problems early can help to prevent a more serious illness from developing in the future. If you are concerned that your child may be experiencing a mental health problem, it is important to take action and to address the symptoms early. Start the conversation. Seek help from a doctor or mental health professional, and show your child there is nothing to be ashamed of. Listen. It could mean all the difference in the world to your child, and to their future.