

Spreading Hope, Spurring Action, Supporting Families, Saving Lives!

"I saw the world in black and white instead of the vibrant colors and shades I knew existed."

-Katie McGarry, author of
Pushing the Limits



Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog Post from the Director

Is Mental Health On Your Back to School Checklist?

Back to School Checklist:

Backpack

Pens and pencils

Back to school clothes

Meetings with teachers

Vaccinations

Mental Health?

The summer is almost over; the back to school ads are already playing; students are anxiously awaiting teacher assignments. Parents and caregivers are going over the back to school supply list, making sure children have all the tools they need to succeed. However, have you thought about your child's mental health needs as part of a successful school year?

The latest research indicates that one in five young people ages 13-18 have, or will have, a serious mental illness in their life, with half of all lifetime cases of mental illness starting by age 14. Mental Health America (MHA) National's *The State of Mental Health in America 2018* indicates that youth mental health is worsening and access to care is limited. In a five-year period, rates of severe youth depression have increased and more than 1.7 million youth with major depressive episodes did not receive treatment.

Adolescence can be a difficult time, with many changes accompanying this time in a young person's life,

whether physical, emotional or social. According to MHA National, “Unrealistic academic, social or family expectations can create a strong sense of rejection and can lead to deep disappointment. When things go wrong at school or at home, teens often overreact.” The organization notes that today’s teens are constantly bombarded by conflicting messages of what life has to offer—both good and bad—on television, through social media, etc.

As teens navigate these difficult years, developing a sense of acceptance and belonging is important. Here are a few suggestions to share with the young people in your life:

Try to make new friends. Healthy relationships with peers are central to teens’ self-esteem and provide an important social outlet.

Participate in sports, job, school activities or hobbies. Staying busy helps teens focus on positive activities rather than negative feelings or behaviors.

Join organizations that offer programs for young people. Special programs geared to the needs of adolescents help develop additional interests.

Ask a trusted adult for help. When problems are too much to handle alone, teens should not be afraid to ask for help.

www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/depression-teens

It can often be difficult to know if a teen is in need of help. We know teens can be moody, but certain behavior changes should be taken as signs of a possible mental health or substance use challenge. Mental Health First Aid’s blog, *5 Signs Your Teen May Be Asking for Help*, notes that teens may not always know how to identify their problems and be reluctant to ask an adult for help directly. That’s why it’s critical for adults who regularly interact with young people to know how to spot the signs of a teen who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge:

They stop showing interest in activities they once enjoyed, and they don’t replace their interests with new hobbies. Changing interests are a normal part of teen behavior, but you may want to check in with a teen who loses interest in their favorite activities without pursuing other interests.

Their grades are slipping, particularly in classes they enjoy. While many things can affect a teen’s academic performance, a sudden change in behavior can be a warning sign for depression.

They avoid discussing future events, such as further education or other opportunities. This could be a sign of depression and may signal suicidal ideation. Check in with a teen displaying this behavior and reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) if you are worried that the person may be considering suicide.

They withdraw from friends, family and social activity. Withdrawing somewhat from family members to spend more time with friends can be considered average teenage behavior, but if a teen is withdrawing from all social situations, it could be a warning sign for a mental health issue like depression or anxiety.

They avoid eating meals, especially in a social setting. A sudden increase or decrease in appetite could be a sign of a mental health issue like depression. But complete avoidance of eating meals, especially around other people, may signal a developing eating disorder.

www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2018/08/5-signs-your-teen-may-be-asking-for-help/

As our youth return to school, it’s important to be as attentive to their mental health needs and challenges, as we are to academic, physical or social challenges. Knowing the resources available to students is critical. Is there a school mental health counselor? Should parents and caregivers be brought in to the conversation? Are there support groups that might be helpful? Mental Health America of Central Carolinas has resources available to help.

Youth Mental Health First Aid

Programs like Youth Mental Health First Aid equip teachers, parents and caregivers with the skills needed to identify and reach out to a young person who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use problem. Join MHA’s certified instructors on Wednesday, October 17, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. for a free Youth Mental Health First Aid class. Click here for registration information.

[Youth Mental Health First Aid](#)

PhotoVoice

MHA will be providing another series of digital storytelling workshops for youth and young adults beginning September 21 and running through October 5, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. PhotoVoice is designed to

promote self-expression, self-empowerment and healing by allowing participants to take photos, share photos with the group, and develop insights through facilitated discussions and person reflection. If you know of a young person age 12-18 who may be interested in this free workshop series, contact MHA's Youth Engagement Specialist Kevin Markle at kmarkle@mhacentralcarolinas.org or 980.406.1527.

Free Online Mental Health Screenings

If you are unsure about what's going on with a young person in your care and have concerns, access MHA's online screening tools for an anonymous and confidential screening. These tools include one specifically for parents and one for youth. While these screenings are not meant to provide a definitive diagnosis, these tools can help guide you as to where to seek help. [Online Mental Health Screening Tools](#)

ParentVOICE

ParentVOICE is an MHA program staffed by parents and caregivers of youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health concerns. We provide trained and caring Family Support Specialists to help families navigate the education, child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health systems. We also provide an opportunity for parents to connect with other parents and caregivers facing similar issues in Cabarrus and Mecklenburg Counties. ParentVOICE provides the education, support and resources that you need to help your child. The ParentVOICE program supports the principles of Integrated Care and System of Care. For general questions about the ParentVOICE program, please contact ParentVOICE Program Director Candace Wilson at (704) 365-3454 ext. 219.

For more information regarding monthly Parent/Caregiver Empowerment Groups and ACTIVE Youth Support Groups in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties, click here:

[ParentVOICE](#)

Starting a new school year can hold great promise for new beginnings, but for an adolescent who is experiencing depression or anxiety, it can also be stressful. Knowing the signs of youth depression and where to seek help can put your adolescent on a path to a healthy and bright future.

Kathy Rogers
Executive Director

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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas promotes mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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