

MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS OF CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Myths and Facts

Myth: Students with mental health concerns exhibit only extreme behavior.

Fact: While some mental health disorders consist of behaviors that are more severe, many are composed of symptoms that are less so. Additionally, students may go to great lengths to hide behaviors or emotions. Therefore, knowing the warning signs and building trusting relationships with students is critical in identifying issues as early as possible.

Myth: Some students are choosing to be difficult. They should just show more effort or choose to have a better attitude.

Fact: Mental health concerns can be a result of numerous factors, including biology, environment, trauma, genetics, and personal relationships. These components are not a choice that a student makes, but factors that must be managed for healthy functioning.

Myth: Schools cannot assist students or families with mental health issues. That is a job for therapists only.

Fact: While it is true that students and families should be supported by numerous professionals, both community- and school-based, school staff can play an important role in providing stability and support for students struggling with mental health concerns.

Myth: Mental illness is connected to decreased cognitive ability.

Fact: IQ and mental illness are not interconnected. Individuals of all intellects can experience mental illness.

Myth: Everyone goes through difficult times. Students cannot experience mental health problems due to life circumstances.

Fact: As mentioned above, many factors can impact a student's mental health. In 2015, the World Health Organization¹ stated that during and after emergencies, people are more

likely to suffer mental health problems than under normal circumstances. Events such as the death of a loved one or divorce can also cause significant changes in a student's environment. While not every child requires additional assistance or support after emergencies or traumatic events, it is important not to neglect these occurrences and their impact on a student's mental health.

Myth: A mental health diagnosis will remain accurate throughout the rest of a student's life.

Fact: Diagnoses occur on a continuum. While diagnoses can be important in gaining an understanding of a student's symptoms, they may change over time. Some disorders are considered lifelong diagnoses, while others may come and go. Educators should familiarize themselves with a student's current strengths and struggles in order to provide meaningful interventions and support.

Educator Fact Sheets

As noted throughout this resource, child and adolescent mental health is comprised of various biological, social, emotional, and environmental elements. The fact sheets on the following pages are intended to provide educators with (a) a brief overview of diagnostic information including symptoms, prevalence, and the development of mental illness; and (b) information regarding symptoms that may be seen within the classroom as well as interventions that may prove helpful. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, DSM-5*,² was used to inform many of the diagnostic descriptions included herein; however, these fact sheets are only to be used as reference points and should in no way serve as recommendations for treatment or care.

References

- ¹ World Health Organization. (2015, October). *Mental health in emergencies* [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs383/en/>
- ² American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5)*. Washington, DC: Author.

Resources

- **National Institute of Mental Health, *The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction***
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml>