

While anyone can be diagnosed with a mental illness at any time, there are some mental illnesses that are most common for children and adolescents to have or be diagnosed with. The six most common mental illnesses for adults to have are Anxiety disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, Asperger's syndrome and eating disorders.

## **Anxiety disorders**

Anxiety disorders are very common, affecting as many as 8% of children under 18. Symptoms of anxiety disorders in children include:

- Feeling extremely frightened and upset during situations in which most others would not experience these symptoms.
- Poor school attendance
- Low self-esteem
- Alcohol or drug use
- Difficulty developing friendships
- Difficulty adjusting to changes

## **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is the most common behavior disorder diagnosed in children and adolescence. There are three types of ADHD.

- Inattentive type, who often:
  - Have a hard time paying attention to detail
  - Make careless mistakes in schoolwork, or fail to finish things
  - Have a hard time organizing, loses things easily
  - Are forgetful or easily distracted, may not seem to listen when spoken to
- Hyperactive/impulsive type, who often:
  - Fidget with their hands or squirm in their seat.
  - Have a hard time doing things quietly.
  - Blurt out answers, have difficulty waiting their turn
  - Are always 'on the go'
- Combined type. This is the most common type of ADHD. It is a mix of the first and second type.

## **Depression**

About 2% of school-age children (i.e. children 6-12 years of age) appear to have major depression at any one time. The risk of depression is higher once puberty starts. Signs that frequently help others know that a child may have depression are:

- Periods of deep sadness
- Conversations about suicide or "being better off dead"
- Irritability
- Drop in grades
- Does not spend as much time with friends

## Bipolar Disorder

Someone with bipolar disorder has high moods called mania and low moods called depression. It is rarer for bipolar disorder to be diagnosed in children and teenagers, however some children as young as 6 are diagnosed. Some signs of bipolar disorder are:

- **Mania.** Mania is a very high mood. Some signs of mania that happen in cases of bipolar disorder that typically do not happen in cases of ADHD are:
  - Difficulty sleeping or not being tired
  - Jumping from topic to topic very quickly
  - Taking huge risks, especially physically
  - Grandiose behaviors or acting as if rules do not apply to them.
  - Acting extremely happy or laughing hysterically without a reason.
- **Depression:** Depression is a low mood. It can make it hard for people to live their daily life. Some signs of depression are:
  - Feeling very sad
  - Feeling very tired or sleeping a lot
  - Feeling angry, guilty, or worthless
  - Eating too much or too little
  - Not being interested in fun activities
  - Thoughts of death or suicide

## Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition that is very common. Those with ASD may have difficulties communicating or interacting with others. Most people are diagnosed in the first three years, although anyone can be diagnosed at any age. Every child will experience ASD differently. Some of the signs of ASD are:

- Plays less with other children
- Difficulties making friends
- Has a hard time communicating
- Extreme interest or focus on specific things
- Repeating behaviors (such as walking in a certain way or eating the same meal every day)
- Repeating phrases or movements (such as hand flapping or twirling objects)
- Difficulty transitioning to new places or changes
- Speaking later than other peers
- Not making eye contact
- Overly sensitive or less sensitive to certain sensory experiences (such as specific sights, smells or sounds as well as feelings of being cold or in pain, etc.)
- Difficulty understanding small facial expressions (like a wink or a smile)
- Difficulties in explaining their emotions
- Difficulties sleeping
- Self-injuring behavior

## Eating Disorders

When someone becomes so obsessed with food and weight issues that they find it hard to focus on other parts of their life, it may be an early sign of an eating disorder. Without treatment, eating disorders can take over a person's life and lead to serious health conditions, even death. There are three types of eating disorders.

- **Anorexia Nervosa.** A person with anorexia will deny themselves food to the point of starving. They will refuse to eat, throw up food after eating, or over exercise. Low food intake forces the body to slow

down to save energy. This causes loss of period, constipation, stomach pain, irregular heartbeats, low blood pressure, dehydration and trouble sleeping.

- **Bulimia Nervosa.** Someone living with bulimia will feel out of control when bingeing on very large amounts of food during short periods of time. They will later use forced vomiting, laxatives or over exercising to feel in control again. This cycle has a very negative effect both emotionally and physically. The emotional signs of bulimia are low self-esteem, feeling guilty or shameful about eating, and withdrawal from friends and family
- **Binge Eating Disorder (BED).** A person with BED eats a lot of food very quickly. They may also eat even when they are not hungry or after they are uncomfortably full. A person with BED, after an episode of binge eating, does not attempt to purge or exercise excessively like someone living with anorexia or bulimia would. A person with binge eating disorder may be normal weight, overweight or obese.

Sources: CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>

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