

# KNOW THE SIGNS: RECOGNIZING MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS IN KIDS AND TEENS

Life during a pandemic is complicated. Along with new safety protocols and restrictions, kids and teens are dealing with changes to routines, school, and socializing. It's normal for kids and teens to have some difficulty getting used to a "new normal." In fact, the majority of young people who took a screen at [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org) between April and July of 2020 mentioned loneliness and isolation as the main things contributing to their struggles.<sup>1</sup> If your kid or teen still seems to be struggling, something more might be going on.

## DID YOU KNOW?

# 50%

OF ALL PEOPLE WHO WILL HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH DISORDER IN THEIR LIFETIME START TO EXPERIENCE SYMPTOMS BY AGE 14.<sup>2</sup>



THE MEDIAN AGE OF ONSET FOR ANXIETY DISORDERS IS 6 YEARS OLD<sup>3</sup>

OF 11-TO-17-YEAR-OLDS WHO TOOK A SCREEN AT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) SINCE MARCH 2020:<sup>4</sup>

**83%** (11,000) SCREENED POSITIVE OR AT-RISK FOR ANXIETY.

**91%** (23,000) SCREENED POSITIVE OR AT-RISK FOR DEPRESSION.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

### Symptoms that happen across multiple conditions:

- Problems with concentration, memory, or ability to think clearly
- Changes in appetite
- Feeling sad, empty, hopeless, or worthless
- Loss of interest in things that they used to enjoy
- Excessive worry
- Irritability or restlessness
- Changes in sleep
- Angry outbursts
- Not wanting to be around people or take part in activities

### Other things to look out for:

- Hearing or seeing things that other people don't
- Extreme panic
- Onset of new behaviors or rituals that are repeated
- Mood swings or frequent shifts in energy
- Changes in how they dress –if your child is wearing long pants and sleeves in hot weather, or hats all of a sudden, they could be hiding signs of self-injury like cutting or hair pulling

## WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE HELP?

If you notice these symptoms in your child, you may want to consider a mental health screening. A screening is a free, anonymous, and confidential way to see if a person is showing signs of a mental health condition. Screening tools for young people and parents are available at [MHAScreening.org](https://www.mhascreening.org). Once completed, screeners are given information about the next steps to take based on results. Screening results can be a helpful tool for starting a conversation with your child's primary health care provider.

## WHEN IS EMERGENCY ACTION NEEDED?

If you notice the following signs in your child, take immediate action as they may be thinking about suicide:

- Giving away possessions for no logical reason
- Risky or self-destructive actions
- Increased drug or alcohol use
- Obsession with death
- Withdrawing from life
- Indirect or direct threats of suicide
- Drastic personality change
- Lack of interest in future plans

If you think a child or teen is in immediate danger of taking suicidal action, call the national suicide hotline at 1-800-273-TALK. Their trained crisis counselors can help you find local resources or suggest next steps. You can also look up information for a local mobile crisis team, psychiatric hospital, or psychiatric unit and

### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Proprietary data (2020). Mhascreening.org.

<sup>2</sup>Kessler RC, Chiu WT, Demler O, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. (2005). Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of 12-month DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 62(6):617-27.

<sup>3</sup>Merikangas, K., Hep, J., Burstein, M., Swanson, S., Avenevoli, S., Cui, L., Benezet, C., Swendsen, J. (2010). Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders in U.S. adolescents: results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication—Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A). *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 49(10): 980-989.

<sup>4</sup>Proprietary data (2020). Mhascreening.org.

