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Know! You Are NOT Alone

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. This year's annual campaign by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) once again highlights, "You are not alone."

Did you know? One in five youth and young adults lives with a mental health condition. It is more common than many people may realize. In fact, those were the numbers prior to 2020. Researchers estimate that current numbers may be more like two in five considering the pandemic. If your child is one of them, they are not alone.

Just like any other health condition, it's vitally important to be aware of the signs and symptoms of mental illness so that it can be addressed. With tweens and teens, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish what's typical adolescent behavior and what's not. According to NAMI, each mental illness has its own symptoms, but the following are common signs to watch out for in adolescents:

- Excessive worrying or fear.
- Feeling excessively sad or low.
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning.
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable "highs" or feelings of euphoria.
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger.
- Avoiding friends and social activities.
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people.
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy.
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite.
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality).

- Inability to perceive changes in one’s own feelings, behavior or personality (“lack of insight” or anosognosia).
- Use of substances like alcohol or drugs.
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing “aches and pains”).
- Thinking about suicide.
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress.
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance.

Unfortunately, there’s no easy test to determine if your child has a particular mental illness. Paying attention to your child’s behavior and checking in with them regularly on how they are feeling is key to recognizing red flags, then seeking help. If you feel your child may be experiencing one or more of the symptoms listed, you are encouraged to reach out to a health professional. Getting an accurate diagnosis can be the first step toward healing. Remember neither you nor your child are alone.

NAMI encourages families seeking help to begin by contacting their health insurance provider, primary care doctor or your state or county mental health authority for more resources and direction. The [NAMI HelpLine](#) is also available to assist families in learning what services and supports are available in your community. *However, if you or someone you know needs help now, you should immediately call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or call 911.*

Sources

[National Alliance on Mental Illness: Mental Health Awareness Month. 2021.](#)

About Know! Parent Tips

Everyone has a role in prevention. By reading and sharing this Know! Parent Tip today, you’re doing your part to prevent substance misuse and create a healthier world for all.

We created these free parent tips to empower parents like you. Know! helps you promote health and wellness and protect the young person in your life from unhealthy behaviors, including alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. However, we rely on donations from people like you to provide these tips. If you found this tip interesting or helpful, [please consider donating at preventionactionalliance.org/donate.](#)

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