

SAMHSA's Action Signs

Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks:

Depression is a serious condition and one of the most common mental health concerns in kids. The primary characteristics of depression are excessive sadness, loss of interest in activities, sleeping problems (either sleeping too much or not enough), lack of energy, preoccupation with death or dying, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt and difficulty in thinking, concentrating, or making decisions.

Seriously trying to harm or kill yourself, or making plans to do so:

Suicide is the result of many complex factors. Important risk factors for suicide and suicidal behavior include prior suicide attempt, other mental and alcohol or substance abuse disorders, feelings of hopelessness, impulsive and/or aggressive behaviors, easy access to lethal methods, especially guns, or lack of involvement in school and/or work ("drifting").

Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart or fast breathing:

Panic disorder is a common and treatable disorder. Kids with panic disorder have unexpected and repeated periods of intense fear or discomfort, along with other symptoms such as a racing heartbeat or feeling short of breath. These periods are called "panic attacks" and can last minutes or go on for hours. Panic attacks frequently develop without warning. Symptoms of a panic attack include intense fearfulness, racing heartbeat, dizziness or lightheadedness, shortness of breath, a feeling

of being smothered, fear of dying, losing control, or losing your mind.

Involved in many fights, using a weapon, or wanting to badly hurt others, OR severe out-of-control behavior that can hurt yourself or others:

Conduct Disorder (CD) is a persistent pattern of behavior in children and adolescents in which the youth is physically aggressive to others...he or she just loses control, but often feels bad afterwards. The child or adolescent usually exhibits these behavior patterns in a variety of settings - at home, at school, and in social situations - and they cause impairment. Behaviors characteristic of conduct disorder include aggressive behavior that causes or threatens harm to other people or animals, non-aggressive conduct that causes property loss or damage, stealing, lying or serious rule violations. In children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), there is an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that seriously interferes with the youth's day to day functioning. Symptoms of ODD may include frequent or extreme rages and temper tantrums, excessive arguing with adults, refusal to listen to adult requests and rules, deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people, blaming others for his or her mistakes, being easily annoyed by others, frequent anger and resentment, mean and hateful talking when upset, or seeking revenge.

Not eating, throwing up, or using laxatives to make yourself lose weight:

Bulimia Nervosa is a serious eating disorder with a destructive pattern of binge-eating and

recurrent inappropriate behavior to control one's weight. Binge eating is defined as the consumption of excessively large amounts of food within a short period of time. The food is often sweet, high in calories, and has a texture that makes it easy to eat quickly. To control one's weight, someone suffering from this condition may use self-induced vomiting, abuse laxatives, starve oneself, or use non-purging behaviors, such as fasting or excessive exercise.

Intense worries or fears that get in the way of his/her daily activities:

Children with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) have recurring fears and worries that they find difficult to control. They worry about almost everything - school, sports, being on time, even natural disasters. They may be restless, irritable, tense, or easily tired, and they may have trouble concentrating or sleeping. Children with GAD are usually eager to please others and may be "perfectionists," dissatisfied with their own less-than-perfect performance.

Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still that puts him/her in physical danger or causes school failure:

There are three main types of ADHD. One type is characterized by inattentiveness, one type is characterized by hyperactive or impulsive behavior, and the third type is combined - when children and adolescents show signs of both types. Symptoms may not be noticed until a child enters school. Some inattentive symptoms include difficulty following instructions, difficulty focusing on tasks, losing things at school and at home, lacking attention to detail, or failing to complete homework or tasks. Some hyperactive symptoms include fidgeting excessively, difficulty staying seated, running or climbing inappropriately, talking excessively, blurting out

answers or frequently interrupting, or having trouble waiting for his or her turn.

Repeated use of drugs or alcohol:

Teens use alcohol and other drugs for many reasons, including curiosity, because it feels good, to reduce stress, to feel grown up or to fit in. It is difficult to know which teens will experiment and stop and which will develop serious problems. Teenagers at risk for developing serious alcohol and drug problems include those with a family history of substance abuse, who are depressed or anxious, who have low self-esteem, and who feel like they don't fit in.

Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships:

Bipolar disorder begins with either manic or depressive symptoms. Some possible signs and symptoms include mania symptoms of severe changes in mood, usually excessively high self-esteem, increase in energy level, risk-taking behavior, or the other hand, depressive symptoms of frequent crying, withdrawal from friends, or decreased energy level. Not all children with bipolar disorder have all symptoms. Like children with depression, children with bipolar disorder sometimes have a family history of the illness.

Drastic changes in your behavior or personality:

A drastic change in personality or behavior could be a sign of a more serious emotional problem. There is a possibility that it could be a sign of a mental health disorder, including but not limited to depression, bipolar disorder, or a personality disorder. For example, people with personality disorders may show signs of impulsivity and instability in mood, self-image, and personal relationships.