



# **MENTAL HEALTH RISK FACTORS: PARENT HANDOUT**

## **FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH**

All children are sad, anxious, irritable, or aggressive at times, and many find it occasionally challenging to sit still, pay attention, or interact with others. In most cases, these are just typical developmental phases. However, such behaviors may also indicate a more serious problem in some children.

### **WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS IN CHILDREN?**

Distinguishing between challenging behaviors and emotions that are a part of normal development and those that may be cause for concern can be hard. Consider seeking help if your child's behavior or emotions last for weeks or longer, cause distress for your child or your family, or interfere with your child's functioning at school, at home, or with friends. *If your child's behavior is unsafe, or if your child talks about wanting to hurt themselves or someone else, seek help immediately.*

### **WHEN MIGHT CHILDREN BENEFIT FROM AN EVALUATION?**

#### **YOUNGER CHILDREN**

- Have frequent tantrums or are irritable much of the time
- Often seem fearful or worried
- Complain about frequent stomachaches or headaches with no known medical cause
- Are in constant motion and cannot sit quietly (except when they are engaged in an activity they enjoy, such as watching videos or playing video games)
- Sleep too much or too little, have frequent nightmares, or seem sleepy during the day
- Are not interested in playing with other children or have difficulty making friends
- Struggle academically or have experienced a recent decline in grades
- Repeat actions or check things many times (for example, repeatedly checking to make sure a door is locked) out of fear that something bad may happen

#### **OLDER CHILDREN**

- Have lost interest in things they used to enjoy
- Have low energy
- Sleep too much or too little or seem sleepy throughout the day
- Have periods of highly elevated energy and activity and require much less sleep than usual
- Spend more and more time alone and avoid social activities with friends or family
- Diet or exercise excessively or fear gaining weight
- Engage in self-harm behaviors (such as cutting or burning their skin)
- Smoke, drink, or use drugs
- Engage in risky or destructive behavior alone or with friends
- Have thoughts of suicide
- Say they think someone is trying to control their mind or that they hear things other people cannot hear

## **WHERE SHOULD I START IF I'M CONCERNED ABOUT MY CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH?**

Being proactive and aware of your child's mental health is an important first step. If you have concerns about your child's mental health, start by talking with others who frequently interact with your child. School-based Mental Health Services are available, FREE of charge, to ALL JCPS students. Contact your school to set up a time to discuss your concerns with a licensed health care professional.



***Get immediate help if you, your child, or someone you know is struggling or having thoughts of suicide. Call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at [988](tel:988) or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). In life-threatening situations, call 911.***

Learn more about warning signs at [nimh.nih.gov/children](https://nimh.nih.gov/children).