

# May is Mental Health Awareness Month

*Your Mental Health in Balance brought to you by your Family of Parishes Mental Health Ministry*

## Older Adult Mental Health Awareness

As people age, they may experience certain life changes that impact their mental health, such as coping with a serious illness, losing a loved one, or retirement. Although many people will adjust to these life changes, some may experience feelings of grief, social isolation, or loneliness. When these feelings persist, they can lead to mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety.



Mental health is important at every stage of life. Recognizing the signs of a decrease in mental wellness, and seeing a health care provider are the first steps to getting treatment. Warning signs include noticeable changes in mood, energy level, or appetite; difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much; difficulty concentrating, feeling restless, or on edge; increased worry or feeling stressed, angry, irritable, or aggressive; ongoing headaches, digestive issues, or pain; misuse of alcohol or drugs; suicidal thoughts; engaging in high-risk activities; obsessive thinking or compulsive

behavior; thoughts or behaviors that interfere with family or social life; and engaging in thinking and/or behavior that is concerning to others.

Effective treatment options are available to help older adults manage their mental health and improve their quality of life. For more information on mental illness, talk with your doctor or a counselor specializing in older adult mental health and visit: [www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/older-adults-and-mental-health](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/older-adults-and-mental-health) .

## Children's Mental Health

Being mentally healthy during childhood means reaching developmental and emotional milestones, and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems. Mentally healthy children have a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, and in their communities.

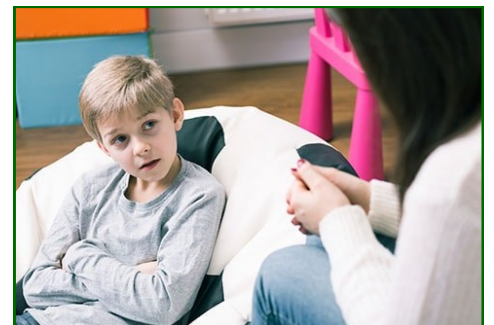
Among the more common mental disorders that can be diagnosed in childhood are attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety (fears or worries), and behavior disorders. Mental disorders among children are described as serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions.

Examples of depression in children are very similar to those of adolescents and adults. Feeling sad or irritable a lot of the time, not wanting to do or enjoy doing fun things, eating a lot more or a lot less than usual, sleeping a lot more or a lot less than normal, changes in energy—being tired and sluggish or tense and restless a lot of the time, having a hard time paying attention, and showing self-injury and self-destructive behavior. Anxiety may present as fear or worry, but can also make children irritable and angry. Anxiety symptoms can also include trouble sleeping, as well as physical symptoms like fatigue, headaches, or stomachaches.

How can we help children with these behaviors? Behavior therapy teaches children and their families how to strengthen positive child behaviors and eliminate or reduce unwanted or problem behaviors. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) focuses on changing the thoughts and emotions of the child that can affect behavior negatively. CBT works by helping a person notice how their thoughts affect how they feel and behave. CBT helps them turn unhelpful thoughts around to more helpful thoughts so they feel better. Experts tell us that CBT is the gold standard of therapy for children, teens, and adults who are experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression. The word “cognitive” refers to what we think, and the word “behavioral” to what we do. CBT can help children and teens:

- “Catch” thoughts that are not helpful, “check” them, and “change” them to feel better.
- Learn to notice and do the things that help them feel better.
- Learn helpful skills like deep belly breathing and mindfulness.

CBT won't be able to fix all the things that make someone feel stressed, anxious, or depressed, but it can help them cope with those feelings and feel better.



**For more articles, resources, or counseling options for any age, please visit: [www.stirenaeus.org/mental-health/](http://www.stirenaeus.org/mental-health/) .**