

Teens and Mental Health

We are hearing more and more about mental illnesses in teens, including depression, anxiety, social phobia and others. The stigma and judgment around mental illness is lessening, but unfortunately still continues. A growing awareness, education and acceptance about these illnesses are keys to those affected getting the help and support they need. Most families have been impacted by a loved one's mental illness. In fact, it is estimated that 54 million Americans suffer from some form of mental disorder in a given year. The good news is that with proper treatment and care, individuals can learn to cope with or recover from a mental illness. Treatment often includes both therapy and medication.

Some common mental illnesses include:

- *depression (including major depression, dysthymia and bipolar disorder)
- *generalized anxiety disorder
- *obsessive-compulsive disorder
- *panic disorder
- *social phobia

Here are some of the warning signs of depression, the most common mental illness:

(Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom. Some experience a few, some many. Severity of symptoms varies with individuals and also varies over time.)

- persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed
- decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- restlessness, irritability
- persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

Mental illness in adolescents can look a little different from adults. Consider these additional symptoms of mental health concerns in teens:

- substance abuse
- inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- defiance of authority, truancy, vandalism, theft
- frequent outbursts of anger

(NOTE: We are also learning more about how poor eating and sleeping habits can impact mood and overall well-being. You may want to consider if either of these are a factor.)

If you are concerned about a loved one or yourself, please speak with a medical or mental health professional. In non-emergency situations you may want to start with your family doctor and your insurance provider. If you believe someone is in immediate danger, dial

911 or take them to local Emergency Room. Locally we also have mobile crisis units that will come out to homes. The number to call in Washington County is 651-777-5222 and in Ramsey County the number is 651-774-7000.

For more information, visit <http://www.nimh.nih.gov> or <http://www.nmha.org>

(Some information from National Institute of Mental Health and Mental Health America.)