

2023 Youth Mental Health Report

KIDS IN CRISIS



New data continues to reveal the mental health toll on youth from COVID-19, social media, mass violence, and the many other challenges kids face every day. While the phrase “mental health crisis” can be alarming for parents, the goal of this report is to shed light on this growing problem, help parents know how they can help their kids, and understand what support is available for their families.

The Data

Being a kid is tough enough. But add in the stressors from COVID-19, social media, mass violence, and the many other problems our society faces today; life is taking a toll on your youth.

According to the CDC, 1 in 6 children, ages 6-17, experience a mental health disorder each year, but only 20 percent of those kids receive care from a mental health provider. And for youth who display warning signs of a mental health illness or need, there is an average of an eight- to 10-year gap between when kids start to show symptoms and when they start to receive care. Early intervention is critical, as [50 percent](#) of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14 and 75 percent by age 24.

For kids ages 12-17, depression, substance use and suicide are growing concerns. According to the [CDC](#), over the last year:

- More than a third (36.7%) reported having persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness
- 15 percent had a major depressive episode
- Nearly 19 percent seriously considered attempting suicide, with suicide being the [second leading](#) cause of death among ages 10-14
- Among girls, [30 percent](#) said they seriously considered attempting suicide, double the rate among boys and up almost 60 percent from a decade ago
- [Almost half](#) of LGBTQ students said they had seriously considered a suicide attempt

The Stressors

After Effects of COVID-19

Throughout the pandemic, [more than 200,000](#) children lost a parent or primary caregiver from COVID-19. [Nearly 30](#) percent had a parent lose their job, more than half (55 percent) experienced emotional abuse and [11 percent](#) were physically abused.

Social Media

Even before COVID, kids [reported feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness](#)—as well as suicidal thoughts and behaviors. In the 10 years leading up to the pandemic, these feelings increased by about 40 percent among young people, according to the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

One reason is social media. While social media has its many benefits, [research shows](#) that youth on social media are three times as likely to experience depression. [Another study](#) from Facebook showed that social media can increase body image issues for one in three teenage girls.

Mass Violence

According to [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), research shows that depression and suicide risks among youth are higher when kids are exposed to mass violence and school shootings. And not surprisingly, information and knowledge of mass violence are linked to increasing levels of fear and anxiety among youth.

Societal Issues

According to the [American Psychological Association](#), other societal factors leading to mental health challenges among children in the U.S. include poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and lack of access to health care and education.

Lack of Access in Schools

[Seventy percent](#) of kids needing mental health support receive mental health services in a school setting. However, a shortage of mental health providers across the U.S. is causing a strain on support for schools. A [2022 Pew Research Center](#) survey found that only half of U.S. public schools offer mental health assessments and even fewer offer treatment services. Mental health services in schools not only impact mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, but also have a direct impact on overall behavior, attendance, substance use, risky sexual behaviors, and suicidal thoughts.

Helping Our Kids

As previously stated, of the millions of kids who experience mental health concerns each year, only 20 percent are getting the care they need. And again, 50 percent of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14 and 75 percent by age 24. One of the best things parents can do is know the warning signs that their kids may need help, and then intervene as early as possible.

Warning Signs

Here are some signs and symptoms to look for when considering if your child needs mental health support:

- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Changes in mood, including outbursts or extreme irritability
- Persistent sadness
- Losing interest in or withdrawing from activities they normally enjoy
- Starting or increasing substance use
- Hurting oneself or talking about hurting oneself
- Talking about death or suicide
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in academic performance
- Avoiding or missing school

Talking About Mental Health

We know kids don't always show signs of mental health concerns and can hide what they are going through or feeling. That's why it's important to have conversations about mental health and ask about their mental health.

For example, you could mention reading this report and ask your child, "Have you noticed an increase in feelings of sadness or stress among your friends? Do you ever feel that way, too?" You also can encourage further conversation by sharing your own mental health status. For example, "All the news about school violence makes me feel so anxious. How have you been feeling about it?"

Another tip is a daily mental health check-in with your family. This could be done using weather terms. For example, everyone can take turns at dinner describing their mental health by selecting appropriate weather

conditions. For happiness, you could say you are feeling sunny. For sadness, you could say you are feeling rainy. For a really bad day, you could say you are experiencing severe thunderstorms.

Having these conversations normalize mental health for your kids and also clues you into any issues your kids might be experiencing.

Screenings

The U.S. Preventive Service Task Force is made of up health professionals and psychologists who evaluate evidence on various preventive health services. The [task force now recommends](#) regular anxiety screenings for youth ages 8 to 18 and regular depression screenings for adolescents ages 12 to 18. This can be done with your primary care physician, school counselor, or mental health professionals.

Getting Help

It's hard to know when to ask for professional help. Dr. Garima Singh, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, says, if you are wondering if you should seek care for your child, the answer is yes. By the time you are considering this, it is time to seek support. Here is how Comprehensive Mental Health Services (CMHS) can help:

School-Based Services

CMHS provides services inside schools in the Kansas City area, serving kids onsite in schools. This allows kids to receive the necessary treatment while preventing barriers to care such as transportation. As previously stated, 70 percent of kids who receive mental health care receive it in a school setting. This program is vital in providing early intervention and helping kids get the help they need. In addition to mental health benefits, partnerships between schools and community partners have proven to:

- Enhance the academic success of individual students
- Significantly improve attendance rates
- Help create a positive school climate
- Improve discipline rates
- Increase graduation rates

Learn more [here](#) or contact your school's school counselor to get started.

Outpatient Therapy and Counseling

Sometimes talking to an expert, who can remain objective and provide sound advice and guidance, can be a great launching pad toward progress. We work with children as young as three through their adolescent years and can provide individual or family therapy support. Learn more [here](#).

Youth Psychiatry

CMHS's psychiatry team can work with your child to help manage symptoms through medication. The team works closely with your child's other providers to make sure medications are working well and adjusted as needed over time. Learn more [here](#).

Youth Community Services (Case Management)

CMHS's youth support services provide community-based services for kids and families with serious emotional disturbances and mental health disorders. We partner with youth, families, and various community agencies involved in the family's life to identify and build on the youth and family's strengths and supports. We also provide evidence-based interventions, skill-building, access to and coordination with community resources, education about mental health symptoms and treatment, and crisis prevention, response and post-vention. Learn more [here](#).

Youth Recovery Services

Our team provides individualized care to help your child overcome substance use concerns and addiction. We offer several levels of care. Learn more [here](#).

Getting Started

To get started, call 816-254-3652 or visit our [Open Access](#) page to learn about walk-in services.

If you or a loved one are in crisis, please call our 24/7 crisis line at 1-888-279-8188, or call or text 988.