

COMMON SIGNS OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

There are red flags that can alert us to children struggling with their mental health. If you see any of the following, seek more information and be prepared to offer support and assistance:⁹

- Any time a young person tells you they need help, or that something is wrong
- Any time a young person tells you they feel “off” and not themselves
- Slipping grades or performance on schoolwork
- Isolation, reluctance, or refusal to go to school, and/or withdrawing from activities
- Sudden changes in relationships, friendships, and social interactions
- Surprising changes in clothing, like long sleeves in warm weather, which could hide self-harm behaviors like cutting or weight loss
- Out-of-character or disturbing behaviors
- Sudden changes in personal hygiene
- Disrupted sleep, including insomnia, nightmares, or sleeping during the day
- Emotional volatility, including getting easily upset, sad, or angry; having a hard time controlling emotions or calming down
- Excessive worry and expressed feelings of anxiety, dread, or panic that don't get better with reassurance or logic
- Temporary relief from fear or anxiety after doing a repetitive action, like saying the same word or phrase or following a particular rule or routine
- Excessive social media and internet use, or suddenly stopping online activity
- Overly secretive and sneaky behaviors
- Use of violent or hateful language toward self or others
- Distinctly flat affect
- Perfectionism or hypervigilance about what others think
- Negative self-talk

These signs may mean a young person is struggling with their mental health, or they could be a red flag for some other issue, like bullying, harassment, or physical illness. There are also young people who suffer silently and have no visible signs of distress. Any child can have a mental health challenge or condition, no matter how “together” or “normal” they seem to be.