

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month



By Susan Ccyk, *Director of the Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services, Delaware Children's Department*

Each year, May provides an opportunity for us to join local and national partners to raise awareness about mental health and to reduce stigma. Children and youth experience the same types of mental health challenges as adults and may often display variations in behavior, feelings, social relationships and academic achievement. During National Mental Health Awareness Month, the Delaware Children's Department encourages everyone to join with us to promote positive mental health and well-being among Delaware's children and youth.

The number of children affected by mental challenges is significant. Estimates suggest that as many as one in five children and youth, from birth to 18 years of age, experience a diagnosable mental health challenge that requires treatment.

The signs of mental health challenges are not always as obvious as broken bones, but treating them is just as important to ensure that children and youth can live a happy and productive life.

Children with untreated mental health problems can wreak havoc on their family. But the consequences, and potential costs, don't stop there. Without treatment, many of these children will need costly special education, end up in the juvenile justice system, drop out of school and grow into adults who are unable to get work and will rely on public assistance.

Children and youth from low-income households are at increased risk for mental health problems and their families often lack the means to get the help they need. It's estimated that 21 percent of low-income children and youth (ages six through 17) have mental health problems, and 57 percent of them come from households with incomes at or below the federal poverty level.

Surveys show that fear of discrimination and stigma may also be a barrier to seeking help. Parents may worry about subjecting their child to public scrutiny, having their parenting skills judged or having their child labeled at school.

Early intervention and treatment can make a positive difference. Studies have shown that involving a professional early in the process can help decrease the risk of developing mental health issues and even prevent them.

For children without insurance, those enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP, or those who require services more intensive than the 30 hours provided in the basic Medicaid child health benefit, the Delaware Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services can provide professional services. Families with private health insurance can find help by calling the number on the back of their insurance card.

Awareness will help our community be stronger and help families reach out for help without the fear of stigma. Learn the signs and get the help you need by calling (toll-free) 1-800-722-7710, or email DSCYF_Intake_General@state.de.us. We can all work together to ensure that Delaware's children, youth and their families can lead happy and safe lives.

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The Children's Department provides services to children who have been abused, neglected, are dependent, have mental health or substance problems, and/or have been adjudicated delinquent by the Courts as well as prevention services targeted toward all youth. For more information, please visit www.kids.delaware.gov.