



When to Worry About Mental Health

Every child is different. It can be hard to tell if your child's emotions and behaviors are just part of growing up, or something to be worried about.

Observe in a Focused Way

Children often communicate through behavior, especially since they might not have the words to be able to express what's bothering them.

Anger, irritability, and even inattention can be a symptom of something going on inside.

As you observe your child's behaviors, look at ones that worry you in a more focused way.

Consider writing a few notes and be as specific as you can about what you are seeing. Notes help you reflect if you decide to reach out to others for insights or help.



Look for Patterns

First step: Do some investigating to determine if there is a pattern of repeated behaviors or emotions. Ask yourself three questions.

1. How frequently do I notice this behavior?

If it is occasionally, or once or twice a week, that may be OK. No one feels or acts great all the time. That's true for kids too.

Behavior that shows up more days than not hints that something else may be going on.

2. How long does it last?

A few minutes is reasonable. Kids need a little time and assistance to regulate big emotions and switch gears.

Behavior that keeps going or appears again and again, or that doesn't diminish with your help, is evidence to support your concerns.

3. How much of a disruption is the behavior?

Does it interfere with major life areas?

How severe is it?

Big emotions or behaviors that interfere with major life areas (school, time with friends, time with family, or activities) are good evidence to look more closely.



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For Children's Mental Health

Wolfson 
Children's Hospital



When to Worry About Mental Health (continued)

WHAT ARE OTHERS SEEING?

Expand Your Investigation

Is the behavior that is worrying you showing up in other situations?

Ask for observations from other people that interact with your child.

Grandparents
Teachers
Coaches
Babysitters/childcare providers

What insights do others have about the frequency, length, and disruption?

What techniques do others have that could help you?

More information helps you find the right kind of help for your child.

Reach Out

Get help from a trusted source, like a school counselor, pediatrician, or other trusted professional.

Take all your notes with you so you can be detailed with your concerns.

Discuss any big changes that may have happened in your life.

Death of a loved one
Friend moving away
Divorce

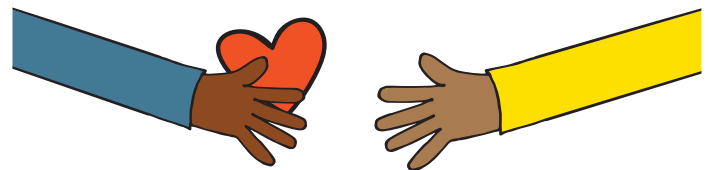
Financial struggles
Sibling changes

Share information about physical health including sleeping, eating, and exercise patterns.

Ask for specific recommendations on the best way to move forward.

Determine if testing, screenings, or a referral to a specialist may be in order.

Take one step at a time and remember to trust yourself.



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