

A young girl with long, straight brown hair is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. She is holding a large, white, plush teddy bear in her arms. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting with warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and slightly somber.

Blue Days

Identifying
childhood
anxiety,
depression,
bipolar disorder,
and more

Written by Gail G. Collins

With half of all lifetime mental disorders beginning by age 14, here are some warning signs to watch for and places Cy-Fair parents can get help.

It's a startling statistic: One in five people will suffer from a serious mental disorder at some point in their life. Anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and attention deficit disorder are prevalent conditions. Children probably aren't the first age group you think of as dealing with these issues, but 4 million children and adolescents in the U.S. suffer from a serious mental disorder that causes a significant impact on their quality of life.

Watching for Warning Signs

With half of all lifetime cases of mental disorders beginning by age 14, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), it is important to pay attention to sudden changes in your child's behavior that could signify the onset of a disorder. As your child's primary caregiver and role model, parents are best suited to identify these changes and decide if it's just a mood swing or something more.

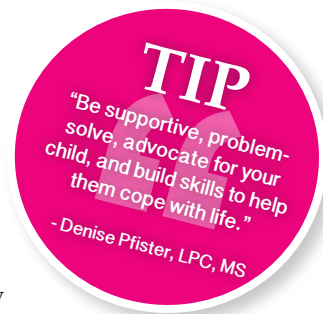
Denise Pfister, a licensed marriage and family therapist at Cypress Family Guidance Counseling, deals regularly with the mental and emotional health of children and identifies possible signs a problem might be brewing. "Their academic performance may slip, they may become withdrawn socially, they may not show interest in their extracurricular activities, or they may become more emotionally volatile," she says.

Mental and emotional disorders can quietly grow over time and seem to come out of left field, leaving many parents to ask why and wondering if it will pass or if their child needs professional help. "Your child may need counseling to work through a difficult period in their development," advises Pfister. And if therapy is needed, counselors count on parents participating in the process. As your child's main support system, you play a vital role in creating and managing his or her emotional and mental health.

Top Concerns in Children

According to NAMI, common concerns in children include attention deficit disorder, with or without hyperactivity, which robs children of the ability to stay focused and often also includes impulsive activity. Anxiety disorders are also prevalent in children, including compulsive behaviors or phobias, which can make daily tasks seem insurmountable. Bipolar disorder, which is associated with unusual shifts in mood and energy, and depression are other concerns to look out for that can have major negative impacts on a child's life.

Psychotherapist Nancy Eisenberg has 30 years of experience and focuses part of her Cy-Fair area practice on families. Because children are still growing, developing as a person, and learning to be part of society, mental and emotional disorders can have a greater impact on them. "Kids are more vulnerable," Eisenberg says. "They don't function independently, so that makes it harder. They see themselves through the eyes of adults."



Treatment Options

All treatment begins with the same game plan: evaluate, strategize, and work as a team towards a solution. Both therapists like to meet with children and parents individually and then negotiate change together. "It's a lot of talking and play therapy with the younger ones," says Pfister. "We spend a lot of time building rapport with adolescents, because they are very guarded."

To parry the difficulties of sharing information discussed in therapy, Eisenberg emphasizes the value of trust to work towards a positive end. Both therapists also utilize testing to identify or aid learning problems or other situations and, if warranted, recommend medication.

Communication skill-building is a priority. Sometimes, children need help being heard and need to be assertive without being defiant.

"It's crucial to build self-esteem," says Eisenberg. "Kids need validation, acknowledgment of their feelings, to know it's safe, and to be accepted."

Seeking Assistance

So how does a parent get help? It is more available and affordable than most people think. Schools, doctors, community centers, and church officials can direct parents to professionals. Most insurance companies also offer referrals these days, and many facilities have a sliding scale for fees, making visits more budget-friendly.

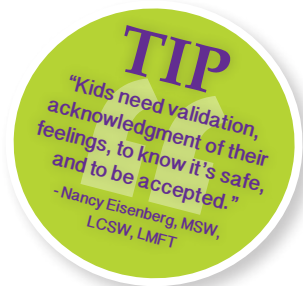
Prevention as a Family

Neuroscientists at the National Institute of Mental Health point out that the brain is designed to learn by example. Things like time management, emotions, and relational aspects create everyday moments, which have a huge impact on the way the brain develops and adapts. Parents setting the example in these areas can keep children on a productive path.

One of the most important things parents can do, however, is simple: Talk to your kids on a regular basis. If parents keep communication lines open, beginning in elementary school and lasting through graduation, and participate in behavior they want to see their children perform, they will gain firm footing.

Eisenberg advises, "Be supportive, problem-solve, advocate for your child, and build skills to help them cope with life." Pfister adds, "Help them feel like they're an integral part of the family, which often comes from slowing down and just spending time together." CFM

GAIL G. COLLINS writes many health stories and enjoys sharing professional knowledge that keeps families strong.



CY-FAIR Mental Health Resources

**Banyan Counseling
– Children and Teens**
8955 Hwy. 6 N., #150
281-855-1982
banyancounseling.com

Nancy Eisenberg
12345 Jones Rd., #100
281-890-5334

**Cypress Family
Guidance Counseling**
13100 Wortham Center Dr.
832-688-9747
cfcounseling.com

Patricia A. Tillson, MS, LMFT
8203 Willow Place S., #274
832-717-4110
patriciaatillson.com

**HOPE Psychotherapy
of Houston**
17510 Huffmeister Rd., #103
281-373-5200
hopepsychotherapyofhouston.com

SALT Christian Counseling
21216 N.W. Fwy., #450
281-352-5534
phbaldwincounseling.com

Katherine Graham, Ph.D
9950 Cypresswood Dr., #200
832-274-4730
drkatherinegraham.com

**Shield Bearer
Counseling Centers**
12345 Jones Rd., #285
281-894-7222
fightingforhearts.org

John Nomura, Ph.D
21216 N.W. Fwy., Ste. 450B
832-377-0063
johnnomura.com

The Counseling Center
14555 Skinner Rd.
281-635-3723
peaceincounseling.com

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