

Recognising mental health difficulties: Suggestions for families

Children's mental health difficulties and how to get help

Some children have emotional and behavioural difficulties that are mild, short-lived and can be resolved with minimum help and support. Others may have difficulties that seem more serious, and interfere with everyday life. Their emotions or behaviour seem to be different to other children of the same age. When problems occur for more than a few weeks and interfere with school, home, friendship or daily life, it is probably time to seek assistance.

The following signs may indicate your child has a difficulty that needs professional attention

- Frequent, unexplained temper tantrums
- Unusual fears
- Difficulty in going to sleep or staying asleep
- Sadness and feelings of hopelessness that don't go away
- Avoiding friends or family and wanting to be alone most of the time
- Refusing to go to school on a regular basis
- Inability to get along with other children
- Hyperactive behaviour or constant movement beyond regular playing
- Noticeable disinterest or decline in school performance
- Frequent aggressive reaction (more than typically expected in the situation)
- Severe difficulties with concentration, attention and organisation
- Significant changes in behaviour over a short period of time





Things to take into account when deciding on the need for treatment

- 1 How severe the symptoms are in terms of:
 - how much distress they cause
 - how often they occur.
- 2 How much impact the symptoms have on the child:
 - at home
 - at school
 - elsewhere.
- 3 How the child's behaviour and feelings compare with that of other children the same age.
- 4 Any particular experiences within the child's family, school, community or culture that may be influencing the behaviours of concern.
- 5 How the difficulties are affecting the child's:
 - behaviour
 - emotions
 - thoughts
 - learning
 - social relationships.

Your doctor or school psychologist/counsellor can provide further advice.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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Department of Health and Ageing

