



EDUCATIONAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS, & MINISTRY LEADERS

# MENTAL HEALTH IN PRE-TEENS

PROVIDED BY RENEWED INTEGRATIVE COUNSELING



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## MENTAL HEALTH

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### ***What is mental health?***

Mental health encompasses the overall well-being of an individual's mind, emotions, and psychological state. It is not merely the absence of mental disorders but involves a dynamic balance between emotional resilience, cognitive functioning, and social interactions. A person with good mental health can effectively cope with life's challenges, form meaningful relationships, and navigate the ups and downs of daily living. Mental health is a continuum, ranging from moments of stress or sadness to sustained states of flourishing and contentment. Understanding and nurturing mental health is essential for maintaining a harmonious and fulfilling life.

### ***Why does taking care of your mental health matter?***

Taking care of one's mental health is paramount because it directly influences overall well-being and quality of life. Just as we prioritize physical health to ensure our bodies function optimally, nurturing mental health is crucial for emotional resilience, clarity of thought, and the ability to handle stress. A sound mental state contributes to effective decision-making, meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose. Neglecting mental health can lead to a range of challenges, from diminished productivity to the onset of mental health disorders. By investing in our mental well-being, we empower ourselves to navigate life's complexities with greater ease, fostering a positive impact not only on our own lives but also on our interactions with others in our communities.

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# MENTAL HEALTH IN PRE-TEENS

The journey from childhood to adolescence signifies a pivotal period marked by many transformations and trials, each potentially influencing pre-teens' mental well-being significantly. Navigating this juncture effectively requires a conscious emphasis on mental health, recognizing it as a cornerstone for adapting to these changes. Pre-teens are encouraged to cultivate essential attributes such as resilience and coping skills while fostering a robust support system.

The acquisition of these skills proves paramount in instilling confidence to confront stressors with resilience. By proactively addressing mental health considerations in the early stages of development, we lay a comprehensive foundation, cultivating the conditions for a future characterized by robust health and thriving well-being.

## **What are the signs of poor mental health in pre-teens?**

Understanding the signs of poor mental health in pre-teens is imperative for caretakers and educators alike. Behavioral shifts, such as withdrawal from social circles or abrupt mood swings, may indicate underlying challenges. Observing a decline in academic performance, difficulties concentrating, or alterations in sleep patterns should be regarded as potential signals. Expressions of hopelessness or complaints about physical discomfort might point to emotional distress. In these instances, the vigilance of parents, teachers, and friends is crucial, as they can play a pivotal role in offering necessary support. Recognizing these signs early on is instrumental, as they may signify the need for professional intervention and comprehensive assistance to navigate the complexities of pre-teen mental health effectively.

# STEPS TO ENHANCE MENTAL HEALTH

- 1. Open Communication:** Encourage open and honest communication. Create an environment where pre-teens feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings, and concerns without fear of judgment.
- 2. Establish Routine:** Consistency in daily routines provides a sense of security for pre-teens. This includes regular sleep patterns, healthy meals, and designated times for homework, play, and relaxation.
- 3. Encourage Physical Activity:** Regular exercise is essential for mental well-being. Encourage pre-teens to engage in physical activities they enjoy, whether it's playing sports, riding bikes, or dancing.
- 4. Teach Coping Skills:** Equip pre-teens with healthy coping mechanisms for managing stress and emotions. This might include deep breathing exercises, journaling, or engaging in creative activities.
- 5. Foster Positive Relationships:** Support the development of positive relationships with family, friends, and peers. Healthy social connections provide emotional support and a sense of belonging.
- 6. Limit Screen Time:** Establish reasonable limits on screen time, especially on social media. Encourage a balanced approach to technology to prevent potential negative impacts on self-esteem and mental well-being.
- 7. Nurture Self-Esteem:** Encourage a positive self-image by recognizing and celebrating achievements. Focus on building confidence and resilience.
- 8. Teach Problem-Solving Skills:** Help pre-teens develop effective problem-solving skills. Encourage them to identify challenges, brainstorm solutions, and evaluate the outcomes.
- 9. Be a Positive Role Model:** Demonstrate positive mental health practices through your own behavior. Show them how to handle stress, setbacks, and emotions in a constructive manner.
- 10. Educate About Mental Health:** Foster awareness and understanding of mental health. Teach pre-teens that it's okay to seek help and that mental health is an integral part of overall well-being.

# WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

- 1. Persistent Behavioral Changes:** If there are persistent and significant changes in a pre-teen's behavior, such as withdrawal from social activities, extreme mood swings, or aggressive behavior.
- 2. Academic Decline:** A sudden and prolonged decline in academic performance, difficulty concentrating, or a notable change in enthusiasm for learning may warrant professional assessment.
- 3. Social Isolation:** If a pre-teen consistently isolates themselves, avoids social interactions, or experiences challenges in forming and maintaining friendships.
- 4. Sleep Disturbances:** Persistent sleep disturbances, whether it's difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing nightmares, may indicate underlying mental health issues.
- 5. Expressing Hopelessness:** Verbalizing feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or expressing a lack of interest in the future should be taken seriously.
- 6. Physical Complaints without Medical Cause:** Frequent complaints of physical ailments (headaches, stomachaches) without a medical explanation may be signs of emotional distress.
- 7. Engaging in Risky Behaviors:** If a pre-teen starts engaging in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, self-harm, or other dangerous activities, immediate professional help is necessary.
- 8. Drastic Changes in Eating Habits:** Significant changes in eating habits, whether it's excessive eating or a sudden loss of appetite, may be indicative of mental health concerns.
- 9. Excessive Anxiety or Worry:** If a pre-teen experiences excessive anxiety, worries excessively about various aspects of life, and it interferes with their daily functioning.
- 10. Unexplained Physical Symptoms:** Complaints of physical symptoms (aches, fatigue) persisting without a clear medical cause may be connected to mental health issues.
- 11. Loss of Interest in Previously Enjoyed Activities:** A sudden loss of interest in activities that the pre-teen used to enjoy may signify emotional struggles.
- 12. Suicidal Thoughts or Self-Harm:** Any indication of suicidal thoughts, self-harm, or expressions of a desire to die requires immediate professional intervention.



Jesus wants us to live life feeling whole and secure in His love and unashamed to ask for help when needed. We are living in a time where mental health difficulties have shown up like never before in God's children. Mental health challenges have become a barrier to change, growth, and living with purpose for so many Christians. God does not want his children living in fear, depression, anxiety, panic, inadequacy, grief, etc. Nevertheless, these are valid feelings that show up and have to be addressed.

Negative feelings may be uncomfortable, but they are necessary signals in our body that tell us that something is wrong in our thinking, our environment, or our spirit. The purpose for these signals is to prompt awareness and need. Still, many believers have allowed negative feelings to literally control almost every decision and outcome in their lives.

It is time for the body of Christ to firmly acknowledge that mental health struggles are real. Taking action to better our mental health will help us to freely build our lives centered in the love and grace of Christ, His word, and live out our purpose to move His kingdom forward. We are done with the enemy setting up camp in the minds of God's children. It is time for us to make the health of our mind just as important as physical health.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a **sound mind**.

2 Timothy 1:7

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