

Guidelines for Parents and Caregivers

Signs Indicating your Child Needs a
Psychiatric Consultation



About this publication

The International Network for Aid, Relief and Assistance-INARA is distributing this publication to parents and caregivers aiming to help them identify their children's mental health needs as well as the signs they should look out for that could indicate their child is in need of a psychiatric consultation.

Children, just like adults, can experience mood swings based on their interactions with their surroundings and the pressures they are facing. This is a very normal part of their daily life, as they should experience different emotions, even negative ones, when they face sad or stressful circumstances. Despite how hard it might be for parents to accept that their child will experience an array of different negative emotions like sadness, experiencing such emotions is necessary to the child's normal development, as s/he needs to learn how to handle different emotions and crises, preparing her/him for life as an adult.

What are the signs you should look out for that indicate your child needs a psychiatric consultation?

How do we distinguish if what the child is going through is normal or alarming? How do we know when to turn to a specialist for help?

There are a lot of signs to look out for in children. When you notice any of them, it is necessary to ask for help from a mental health specialist. Some of these signs include but are not limited to:

- **Mood swings that last for several days, especially if these mood swings have no apparent reason.**
- **Lack of interest in playing and spending time with friends; not enjoying activities they usually like.**
- **Constant fear, stress or anxiety.**
- **Changes in appetite and weight (this applies to losing or gaining weight by accident or on purpose).**
- **Changes in sleep patterns.**
- **Decline in school performance.**
- **Tiredness or slowness of movements without any health issues.**
- **Thoughts or acts that include some type of violence, self-harm, or injury to others.**
- **Repetition of specific words or actions.**
- **The child's desire to see a specialist.**
- **Isolation from friends or family; difficulty engaging with friends.**
- **Recklessness or taking wrong decisions.**
- **Use of cigarettes, alcohol or any narcotic substances.**
- **Complaining of physical pain with no apparent medical reason.**
- **Sudden and apparent changes in behavior or personality (E.g., unusual thoughts and behaviors).**

We emphasize on the fact that negative emotions or behaviors can come and go, and are a very normal part of a child's development, as mentioned above. However, experiencing any of these signs for weeks or months could be an indicator of a behavioral or emotional disorder. Lastly, it is of the utmost importance to stress that parents are the experts in their child's case. As a result, if the parents have any concerns or doubts about their child's well-being, they should take her/him to see a specialist right away so he can assess the child's case and respond to their questions and concerns. As a matter of fact, early treatment prevents things from developing any further and protects the child from developing mental disorders when they grow up. Mental health services are available to all children through psychiatrists and psychologists' clinics, dispensaries, and charity organizations that provide these types of services nearly for free, or even free of charge.

You can consult The International Network for Aid, Relief, and Assistance - INARA in this regard by contacting us through our website www.inara.org. The team will pass on your queries to our specialists.