

Children's Mental Health Week:

Why Supporting Young Minds is Vital

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A STORY OF SILENT STRUGGLES

When Sarah turned 14, her world changed. Once a cheerful and lively teenager who loved painting and cycling, she gradually withdrew from her friends and family. Her parents noticed she was often tired, irritable, and her grades began to slip. Sarah couldn't quite explain it herself—there was no big traumatic event, no single reason. A constant weight seemed to press down on her chest, and she no longer found joy in the things she once loved. The breaking point came when her mother found a tear-streaked note Sarah had written: "I don't know what's wrong with me. I feel so alone."

Sarah's story is not uncommon. Around the world, millions of children and adolescents silently battle mental health challenges. The most heartbreaking part? Many don't receive the support they desperately need. Children's Mental Health Week shines a light on this critical issue. It's a chance for us to focus on the well-being of young minds and recognize why mental health in children and adolescents matters—because their future, and ours, depends on it.

THE STATE OF CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH: REAL FACTS AND FIGURES

According to UNICEF, 1 in 7 children aged 10–19 years globally experiences a mental health disorder. That equates to about 166 million adolescents—a staggering figure that highlights the scale of the issue. Mental health conditions in children can range from depression and anxiety to more severe disorders such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

The World Health Organization (WHO) also emphasizes the urgency of addressing adolescent mental health. It reports that half of all mental health conditions begin by age 14, yet most cases go undetected and untreated. Depression, for instance, is one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents worldwide. Even more concerning, **suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15- to 19-year-olds.**

These numbers are more than statistics—they reflect real lives. Behind every figure is a child like Sarah, struggling to navigate emotions, pressures, and challenges that feel insurmountable. The data makes one thing clear: mental health in children and adolescents is not just a small issue—it's a global crisis that demands urgent attention. But why is this such a critical topic? Simply put, a child's mental health shapes their life. It influences their education, relationships, physical health, and overall well-being. When young people are mentally healthy, they can thrive, build resilience, and unlock their potential.

▲ Young Minds

However, when mental health challenges go unaddressed, they can leave lasting scars, impacting adulthood and future generations.

THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

Despite the growing awareness around mental health, significant barriers still stand in the way of progress:

- 1. Stigma and Shame:** In many cultures, mental health is still a taboo topic. Children and their families often fear being judged, leading to silence and shame. Adolescents may be afraid to open up, worried they'll be misunderstood or dismissed.
- 2. Lack of Awareness:** Many parents, teachers, and caregivers aren't equipped to recognize the signs of mental health struggles in children. Early intervention is crucial, but it often doesn't happen because the warning signs go unnoticed.
- 3. Limited Resources:** In many countries, mental health services are severely underfunded. According to WHO, only a small percentage of national health budgets are allocated to mental health care, leaving children without access to professional support.
- 4. Social and Economic Pressures:** Poverty, violence, neglect, and academic stress can significantly impact a child's mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified these challenges, isolating young people and disrupting their routines.
- 5. Digital Influence:** While technology connects young people, it also brings new challenges. Social media pressures, cyberbullying, and constant comparison can worsen anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues among adolescents.

Addressing these challenges requires a collective effort—one that brings families, schools, communities, and policymakers together.

HOW DO WE REACH A SOLUTION?

The path to improving children's mental health starts with acknowledging its importance and committing to change. Here's what is necessary:

- 1. Early Identification and Intervention:** Schools, parents, and communities must learn to recognize the early warning signs of mental health struggles. Early intervention can prevent minor challenges from escalating into severe conditions.
- 2. Accessible Mental Health Services:** Governments must prioritize funding for mental health care, ensuring children have access to counselors, therapists, and support systems, regardless of their socioeconomic background.



3. **Education and Awareness:** Mental health literacy should be integrated into school curricula to teach children and adolescents about emotions, coping strategies, and seeking help. Parents and educators also need training to support young people effectively.
4. **Safe and Supportive Environments:** Creating safe spaces—both at home and in schools—where children feel heard and understood can make a world of difference. Strong support networks help children build resilience.
5. **Reducing Stigma:** We must challenge outdated beliefs and normalize conversations about mental health. Children should know that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

**WHAT CAN WE ALL DO?
5 ACTIONS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Here are five practical steps everyone can take to support children's mental health:

1. **Listen Without Judgment:** Create a safe space where children can share their thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, just being there to listen can help them feel less alone.
2. **Educate Yourself:** Learn to recognize the signs of mental health struggles—changes in behavior, mood, or sleep patterns—and act early.
3. **Talk About Mental Health Openly:** Normalize conversations about emotions and mental health at home, in schools, and in communities. Share stories that encourage openness.

4. **Advocate for Better Policies:** Support initiatives and policies that prioritize mental health funding and resources for children and adolescents. Speak up for change.
5. **Model Healthy Behaviors:** Children learn by watching adults. Demonstrate positive coping strategies, like managing stress, staying active, and seeking help when needed.

LET'S NOT LEAVE THEM ALONE

Imagine this: a classroom of 30 children. Statistically, at least four of them are silently struggling with their mental health right now. They're sitting in the same room, sharing the same lessons, but carrying invisible burdens no one can see. Maybe it's the child who's always quiet,

the teenager who acts out, or the friend who smiles but feels empty inside. These children—just like Sarah—need us to pay attention. They need us to step up, break the silence, and let them know it's okay to not be okay. We have the power to change the narrative, to give every child the chance to grow up feeling supported, understood, and loved. Children's Mental Health Week reminds us that young minds are the foundation of our future. By investing in their mental well-being, we're investing in a brighter, healthier tomorrow. Let's be the adults who don't overlook their struggles. Let's create a world where no child feels alone, where mental health is prioritized, and where every child can dream, thrive, and live to their full potential. Because every child deserves to feel heard. Every child deserves hope. And it starts with us.

By working together—parents, teachers, communities, and leaders—we can give children and adolescents the support they need to face life's challenges with resilience and strength. Let's not wait another day to make a difference.

The time to act is now. For Sarah. For every child. For the future.

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