



Signs of Trouble in Youth

This document outlines signs that a child or adolescent is experiencing stress, mental or emotional distress, or developing troublesome behaviors. Parents and caregivers can watch for these signs as indications that their children or adolescents may need the support of community resources.

Although every child is unique and the influences on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors may vary, parents and caregivers are positioned to be one of the first in their child's life to recognize that something is not right.

The signs of distress may be very subtle and inconsistent. So, if you suspect that your child is at risk, lovingly respond by checking in with your child and consider seeking professional support.

Potential Warning Signs in Early Childhood

-  Changes in eating habits
-  Withdrawal or isolation
-  Changes in friendships
-  Sleep difficulties, nightmares, or bed wetting
-  Mood changes, such as hopelessness, anger, irritability, violent outbursts
-  Poor school attendance or performance
-  Regression to less mature behaviors (e.g., whining, clinging, thumb-sucking, tantrums)
-  Separation anxiety
-  Radical change in dress or appearance
-  Physical harm of self or others, fighting, or desire to hurt others
-  Intense worries or fears
-  Drastic or dangerous changes in behavior or personality
-  Difficulty concentrating or staying still
-  Physical harm of self or others/fighting/desire to hurt others

















Stay Involved in their Schoolwork!

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, truancy or international unauthorized absences from school is the number 1 predictor that a boy will have a criminal record and the number 2 predictor for girls.

Potential Warning Signs in the Teenage Years

Youth, around the start of 6th grade or the initiation of middle school, can begin to exhibit behavioral changes. This can result from typical hormonal, neurological, or social influences. Sometimes, however, it can indicate more serious concerns.

One of the most perplexing challenges parents may face is determining if their child is at risk for behaviors such as the following: drug, alcohol, or tobacco use; poor academic attendance or performance; violence; depression; self-destructive behaviors (e.g., cutting, eating disorders); criminal activities; or suicide. Below are signs that an adolescent may need help:

 Withdrawal or isolation	 Diminished interest in activities or hobbies
 Disrespect or rejection of family values	 Declining grades or school absences
 Lying	 Promiscuity
 Extreme mood swings	 Unexplained weight loss
 Alcohol, drug, or tobacco use	 Financial changes
 Change in friends	 Self-harm
 Taking risks	 Talk of suicide

How to Recognize Substance Use:

- Decreased motivation
- A rapid loss of weight
- Paleness or discoloration of the skin
- Dark circles under the eyes
- Shaky hands
- Sudden mood changes (irritable, depressed, anxious)
- Hostile outbursts or anger at family members
- Lower grades
- Absences from school without parental knowledge
- Change in physical appearance (poor hygiene, style change)
- Missing money or valuables
- Change in friends
- Secretive behavior
- Forgetfulness
- Unusual sleeping habits



GET HELP IMMEDIATELY!

If your child or adolescent is talking about **suicide** or indicating **an interest in harming themselves**, don't delay! Seek the help of a mental health professional immediately.

Warning Signs

Talking about killing themselves or the following:

- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Seeking revenge
- Feeling trapped
- Pain being unbearable

Change in behaviors:

- Increased substance use
- Researching or identifying a means to kill himself or herself
- Taking risks or acting recklessly
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people (i.e., to say goodbye)
- Giving away prized possessions
- Suffering from anxiety or panic attacks

Additional resources, skills, and strategies for parents are available at no cost through the online Thrive Initiative programming. Visit the Thrive website <https://thrive.psu.edu>, and sign up today!