



Did You Know?

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Children & COVID: “It’s only a matter of time before a tsunami sort of reaches the shore of our service system, and it’s going to be overwhelmed with the mental health needs of kids,” said Jason Williams, a psychologist and director of operations of the Pediatric Mental Health Institute at Children’s Hospital Colorado. The way children live, interact, play and learn have all been altered by this pandemic. This mass change is sure to have a ripple effect in the mental health status of our youth. How can we combat this decline in mental health, and how do we prepare our children and ourselves for the aftermath of COVID-19?

What You Should Know:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shares that the amount of children visiting the emergency departments with mental health issues increased 24% from mid-March through mid-October, compared with the same period in 2019.
- The majority of emergency departments lack adequate capacity to treat pediatric mental health concerns, potentially increasing demand on systems already stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Child Mind Institute shares, “Of the 74.5 million children in the United States, an estimated 17.1 million have or have had a psychiatric disorder — more than the number of children with cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined. Half of all psychiatric illness occurs before the age of 14, and 75 percent by the age of 24.”
- A recent CDC report revealed concerning trends about the mental health of high school students pre-COVID.
 - More than 1 in 3 students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2019, a 40% increase since 2009.
 - About 1 in 5 students seriously considered suicide. Female students were nearly twice as likely as male students to make a suicide plan during 2019.
- Many students receive mental health services through community agencies and school. Limitations and restrictions imposed due to the pandemic have decreased accessibility to such services. For some, this change could exacerbate stress related to the pandemic and cause anxiety about illness, social isolation, and decreased connectedness to peers and their school community.

What You Can Do:

- **Talk to Your Kids:** It might feel awkward to start the conversation regarding mental health with your child, but it is important to “break the ice” and create a safe place for everyone to share their feelings. If your child is not ready or comfortable to verbalize how they are feeling just yet, that’s okay! Find creative ways to make mental health check-ins a part of your every day. For example, incorporate a time of journaling into your family’s daily routine. Try encouraging your child to download a meditation or mindfulness app, like *headspace*, to help upkeep their mental health. Just remember to validate and “hear” everything your child is sharing with you.
- **Talk To Your Providers:** You are not alone. Whether you need some fresh ideas on how to approach mental health with your child, or if you’re interested in professional mental health services for your family, there are resources available. Consider contacting your child’s primary care office to connect with community mental health linkages, visit justtellone.org, or contact your child’s school guidance department. We also provide mental health services for youth here at The Council. Contact us for more information regarding our Student Assistance Program and Triple P Teen Discussions. The more we do now to address the impacts of the pandemic, the healthier our community and our families will be.

Information obtained from: cdc.gov; childmind.org; webmd.com

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The Prevention Council of Erie County, publishes Did You Know, a regular update about alcohol & other drugs -- America’s #1 public health problem. The Prevention Council • 1625 Hertel Ave., Buffalo, NY 14216 • 716-831-2298 • www.thepreventioncouncil.org