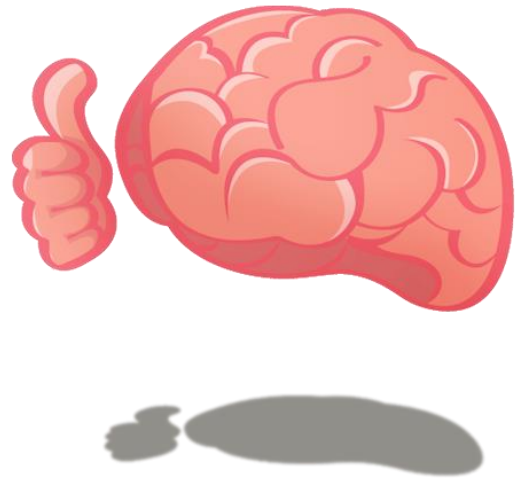




## >> What is Mental Health?

What comes to mind when you hear “mental health?” Does something positive or negative come to mind? There are many definitions out there about what mental health is, but here is the breakdown: mental health is the condition of our mental well-being, that is, our ability to cope with life’s stresses, realize our own abilities and potentials, and our ability to be productive and contribute to our community. It affects the way we feel, reason, and act – shaping the way we handle pressure, communicate with others and make decisions. Having positive mental health is important, but the truth is 20% of youth experience a mental health illness during any given year.<sup>1</sup> That means you are not alone! Many teens experience mental challenges, some of which include anxiety, depression, bipolar, substance abuse, eating and psychosis disorders.

When we think of mental illness or mental health challenges, many negative words come to mind. This is because of the stigmas that society is plagued with. A mental health challenge or condition should not be considered any different than a medical condition, which is generally referred to with positive and empowering words. For example, “cancer” may bring up words like “survivor”, “brave”, and “strong.” Unfortunately mental health conditions are considered something negative and that should NOT be the case! Did you know that 50% of the total population has a diagnosable mental health disorder sometime during their lifetime; most of which the first onset generally occurs during childhood or adolescence?<sup>ibid.</sup> Mental health is an important component to our physical well-being and nothing to be ashamed of. The key is not to be ashamed, get help and learn healthy strategies to overcome life’s challenges.



So, break away from the negative undertones that society places over mental health challenges. You are equally brave, and strong, and a survivor, just as much as a person with a medical condition. There is no shame in seeking help if you feel something may be wrong. The earlier you get help, the faster you can recover and learn skills to overcome your situation and feel better again. Believe me there is hope! Reach out! Don’t ever give up on yourself. For those of us who may not be experiencing a mental health challenge, simply by being present and there for others can save a life! Encourage and be supportive. Be

<sup>1</sup> “Mental Health Challenges and Disorders in Youth.” *Mental Health First Aid USA: For Adults Assisting Young People*, 1st ed., National Council for Behavioral Health, Washington, DC, 2005, p. 5.



a friend! Helpful tips: 1) Do not leave someone suffering in silence or solitude, 2) help them feel accepted and supported, 3) guide them toward adults or professionals who can help, and 4) do not try to solve things on your own or keep things secret. These are the best ways YOU can help and be a friend.

**Not sure if you are experiencing a mental health challenge?** Taking part in the following actions, or having a few of the subsequent emotions, can be signals of concern:

- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of motivation and sense of purpose
- Staying away from friends, family & activities
- Eating too much or too little
- Having strange discomfort, pains, or sensations
- Feeling like nothing matters or no one cares
- Drinking, smoking, or consuming drugs to drown emotional feelings
- Excessively sad
- Easily angered, aggressive or violent toward others
- Feeling absent, disordered, annoyed, on edge, concerned, distressed, or frightened
- Having tireless memories and thoughts you can't get out of your head
- Thinking of hurting others or yourself
- Hallucinating- believing in things that are not factual or hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting things not present
- Difficulty or unable to perform everyday responsibilities such as getting dressed, keeping up with personal hygiene, going to school or doing school work

#### **Protective Factors for a Positive Mental Health:**

- Opening up to someone you trust
- Seeking professional help if necessary
- Forming relationships with others
- Being active, constructive recreation like sports
- Staying positive, having a good self-esteem
- Sleeping well, getting enough hours of sleep
- Eating well
- Learning coping skills
- Developing healthy and good problem solving skills
- Having a good support system
- Spirituality
- Serving others
- Avoiding alcohol, tobacco and other drugs



*Image by: EmpowHER*

### **Good mental health can help you manage pressure and realize your true potential**

If you feel like you are struggling or something doesn't feel quite right, there is always hope for you. Reach out to those around you or the many resources that are available. You can text the Crisis Text Line below to chat with someone who cares, or find a trusted adult to talk to such as a parent, school counselor, coach, community leader.

#### **Need someone to talk to?**

**Text Crisis Text Line @ TEXT "HOME" TO 741741**

<http://www.crisistextline.org/textline/>

**Additional Mental Health Resources:** <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Teens-Young-Adults>  
<http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/>  
<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/your-mind/>



Staff Writer: Emily Davis  
Staff Editor: Diana Rodriguez

**North Carolina Center for Safer Schools**

<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/cfss>

Sources: Mental Health First Aid™ USA, <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>