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Mental Health Facts and Impact on Youth

- The U.S. Surgeon General (1999) reported that 1 in 5 children and adolescents experience a significant mental health problem during their education years and 5% report experiencing “extreme functional impairment.”
- Of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems, only 1 in 5 will receive treatment and many will receive these services from school-based mental health professionals.
- Four million children and adolescents in this country suffer from a *serious* mental disorder that causes significant functional impairments at home, at school and with peers. Of children ages 9 to 17, 21% have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder that causes at least minimal impairment. (NAMI)
- Anxiety disorders, mood disorders (e.g. depression), and disruptive disorders (e.g. attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder) are the most common mental disorders among children. Of these, research indicates that anxiety disorders are the most common, affecting about 13% of children aged 9-17. More than 6% of children are estimated to have some form of mood disorder, and 4% are estimated to have a disruptive disorder. (Bazelon)
- Untreated mental health problems can lead to substance abuse, violence, and suicide; as well as negatively impact academic achievement, vocational development, social emotional development, and behavioral functioning at school and in the home and community.
- Approximately 50% of students age 14 and older who are living with a mental illness drop out of high school. This is the highest dropout rate of any disability group. (NAMI)
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death in youth ages 15 to 24. More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza and chronic lung disease *combined*. Over 90% of children and adolescents who commit suicide have a mental disorder. (NAMI)
- Untreated mental illness may also increase a child’s risk of coming into contact with the juvenile justice system—66% of boys and almost 75% of girls in juvenile detention have at least one mental disorder, according to one study. (Bazelon)
- The President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003) acknowledged that “While schools are primarily concerned with education, mental health is essential to learning as well as to social and emotional development. Because of this important interplay between emotional health and school success, schools must be partners in the mental health care of our children.”

- Schools that provide expanded mental health services have reported improved school climate, reductions in special education referrals, disciplinary referrals, suspensions and grade retentions. In addition, early interventions for at risk and low-income children have resulted in savings in public expenditures for special education, welfare assistance and the criminal justice system.

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