

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN

The research literature demonstrates that about one-quarter of children and young people experience a mental health problem in any given year, and one-third at some time in their lives. Problems can impact family life, social relationships, and schoolwork, and cause great concern for the different people in a child's life, including parents, relatives, friends, and teachers. It can be difficult to explain or understand a child's problems, and to think how best to support a child who is having difficulties.

Increasing recognition of mental health problems means that children's well-being is now seen as just as important as their physical health, educational achievement, and social development. There are good reasons to be hopeful. Children's well-being is increasingly being researched and understood, and there is an accumulating body of evidence showing that child mental health problems can be treated effectively.

What are some common mental health problems in children and young people?

Because children are growing and changing, it can be difficult to know when a child's behavior is just a normal part of growing up, or perhaps a sign of a bigger issue. All children are different, and even the most typical child or young person may sometimes engage in "problematic" behaviours, especially when they are tired, stressed, or sick, or there are changes in the family. For example, the birth of a sibling may cause a child to temporarily change their behaviour.

The following questions might help you consider whether your child may be experiencing a psychological problem:

- Does your child seem to have changed from how they normally are? This may have happened in relation to a stressor or significant change in some part of their lives.
- Has your child lost interest in things they previously enjoyed, or begun avoiding things that they were previously comfortable with?
- Does your child seem to be regularly distressed and unhappy?
- Does your child seem to be regularly anxious or angry?
- Has your child returned to behaviours that they had grown out of?
- Does your child seem to be thinking or behaving differently to how other children of a similar age think and behave?
- Have your child's school work or school interactions changed?
- Have other people such as friends, family members or teachers observed a change or a problem?

Common mental health problems in children and young people

- Worry
- School fears
- Fears about separating from parents
- Social fears
- Phobias
- Obsessions and compulsions

- Difficulty adjusting to bereavement or trauma
- Low mood or suicidal thoughts
- Self-harm
- Sleep problems
- Eating problems
- ADHD
- Behaviour problems
- Problems that stem from physical or educational challenges
- Drug and alcohol problems

Seeking support

If your child seems to have changed or their usual development seems to have been interrupted, you may want to consider consulting a mental health professional who specialises in working with children and young people.

Dr Siddaway has a broad training in evidence-based therapies and is able to provide individualised interventions that account for the developmental level of the child and the different individuals in each family. For example, depending on the particular issues, it may be helpful to work with the young person, or the parent, or both. Some parents simply want a consultation to check things over and be pointed towards some things to try. Other parents may want ongoing support as the problems are difficult to shift. Dr Siddaway is able to draw on his extensive training and to adapt and tailor interventions to the needs of each family. He is able to adapt to your needs and will be happy to discuss how he might be of help.