

Mental health issues have risen dramatically in recent years among our youth. Studies show this is connected to increased academic pressures, and the rise in use of social media and screens in general, which also often results in lack of social interactions.

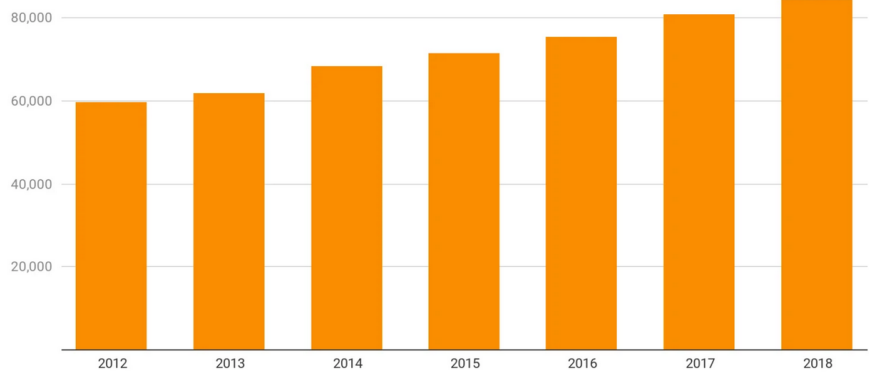
Mental health issues can be experienced in different ways. These struggles become more prominent during adolescence. Mental health goes beyond emotional reactions and can become something longer lasting.

Some common signs may include:

- Feeling sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping
- Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Trouble understanding/relating to situations and to people
- Problems with alcohol or drug use
- Major changes in eating habits
- Sex drive changes
- Excessive anger, hostility or violence
- Suicidal thinking

California Youth In Mental Health Crisis

In 2018, California emergency rooms treated 84,584 young patients ages 13 to 21 who had a primary diagnosis involving mental health. That is up from 59,705 in 2012, a 42% increase, according to the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development.



Credit: Phillip Reese for California Healthline
Source: California Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development • Created with Datawrapper

More than 1/3 of parents of kids under 18 say there is a child in their life who they think needs mental health support.



Source: The Heart Phil and Suzanne Children's Hospital

PREVENTION IS KEY

Research has now shown that most mental health issues follow a developmental course that typically starts early in life. Many people who suffer from anxiety, psychotic or mood disorders, depression, social phobia, obsessive compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia showed signs in adolescence or even earlier. Intervening as early as possible preserves quality of life and it can cost less both emotionally and monetarily.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TAKE MENTAL HEALTH BREAKS DAILY:

- Take a walk or a hike. Getting outside decreases our stress levels. Even if it's raining.
- Do something fun (and healthy): listen to music, exercise, journal or read a good book.
- Implement mandatory study breaks. Our kids are under heavy academic pressures and need to learn how to balance their study and play time.
- Help someone out. It's proven to be therapeutic when we selflessly help others.
- Take a break from social media, maybe even from technology (for a few hours, or a few days).

4 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU START YOUR DAY

- 1) Express gratitude
- 2) Set your intentions (realistic expectations)
- 3) Smile for no reason in the mirror
- 4) Take 5 long deep breaths

If you're concerned about your child's mental health:

- Seek professional advice. Don't avoid getting help for your child out of shame or fear.
- Seek ways to join your child in relaxing activities, even if that means watching their favorite TV show with them.
- Explore fun activities as well, something interactive that can facilitate a better connection between you and them.
- Encourage your child to take a chance on trying something new (sport, club, hobby, interest). Explain that they don't have to be great at everything, it's important to try new things in life even if we 'fail' at them. These practices will equip them with more resilience and teach them how to recover from setbacks.
- Consider doing a social media or screen detox, maybe absolute abstinence for a period of time or just more regulated use.
- Seek professional advice on how to improve interactions with your child and how to handle difficult behavior. Explore different stress management techniques. Inform school counselors/teachers if you're concerned about your child's mental wellness.
- Contact the NAMI HelpLine at 800-950-NAMI to find out what services and support are available in your community.
- Connect with a trained crisis counselor to receive free, 24/7 crisis support via text message by texting "NAMI" to 741741.