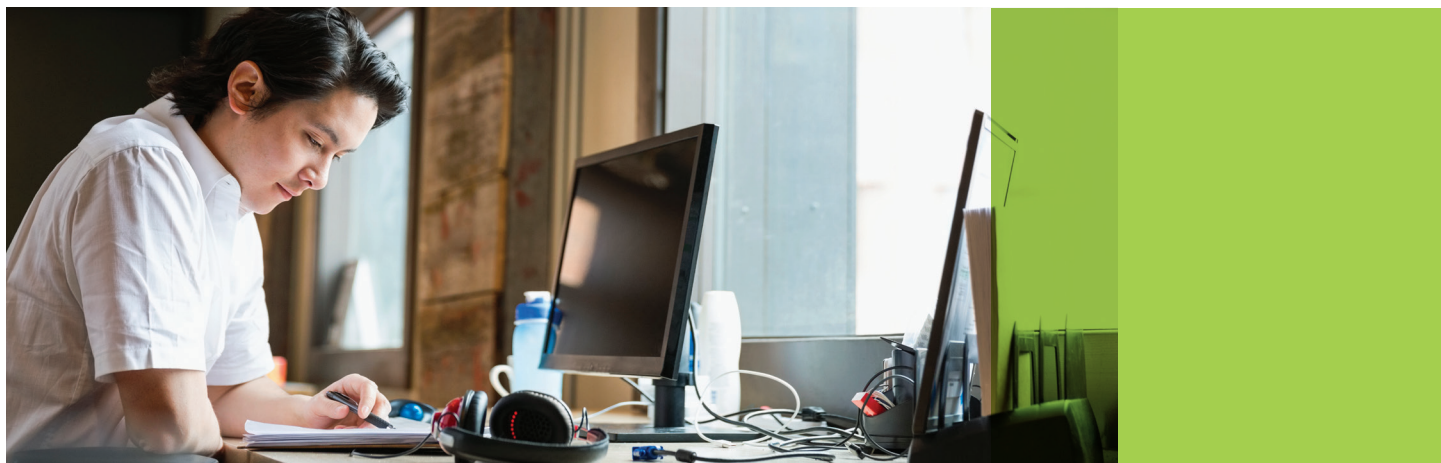


# Common warning signs and symptoms of mental illness



Mental illness occurs in all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. There is no single cause for mental illness. A number of factors can contribute to risk, such as those listed below.<sup>1</sup>

## Self-assessment: Potential mental illness risk factors

Mark any factors that could apply to you.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Early adverse life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse (for example, child abuse, sexual assault, witnessing violence, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Experiences related to other chronic medical conditions, such as cancer or diabetes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Biological factors, such as brain trauma or chemical imbalances in the brain
<input type="checkbox"/>	Genetics or family history
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use of alcohol or recreational drugs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Taking certain medications
<input type="checkbox"/>	Having few friends
<input type="checkbox"/>	Having feelings of loneliness or isolation

It is not always easy to know what is normal and what is not normal when it comes to mental health. There is no easy way to test for a mental illness. Behaviors could be typical for an individual or the result of a physical illness.

While each mental illness has its own characteristics, some common symptoms of mental illness in adolescents and adults are listed below. The most common symptoms for adolescents and young adults are indicated with an asterisk (\*).

## Symptoms of mental illness in adolescents and adults<sup>2</sup>

- Sudden, overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes along with a racing heart, physical discomfort or difficulty breathing\*
- Feeling excessively sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks\*
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating, learning or staying still\*
- Severe, out-of-control risk-taking behavior that causes harm to self or others\*
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people\*
- Trying to harm or end one's life or making plans to do so\*
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress\*
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance\*
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy\*

### Symptoms of mental illness in adolescents and adults<sup>2</sup> (continued)

- Changes in eating habits, such as increased hunger or lack of appetite that results in significant weight loss or gain\*
- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality (called "lack of insight")\*
- Abuse of substances such as alcohol or drugs\*
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable "highs" or feelings of euphoria\*
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Change in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes, such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing aches and pains

Mental health conditions can also begin to develop in young children. Because they are still learning how to identify and talk about their thoughts and emotions, their most obvious symptoms are behavioral. Symptoms that may occur in children are listed below. Keep in mind that these symptoms could be related to something other than a mental health condition.

### Symptoms possibly suggestive of mental illness in children<sup>2</sup>

- Changes in school performance
- Excessive worry or anxiety, for example resisting going to bed or school
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums



#### What can you do?

Visit with a health care provider or mental health professional as soon as possible if you notice symptoms of poor mental health in yourself or others.

#### Sources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Learn About Mental Health: Mental Health Basics, 2018
2. National Alliance on Mental Illness, Know the Warning Signs. Available from: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org); accessed on 5-1-2020.

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