

MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CEREBRAL PALSY



A TOOLKIT FOR
PARENTS OF YOUNG
PEOPLE WITH
CEREBRAL PALSY



CP-ACHIEVE
Centre of Research Excellence

Australian Centre for Health, Independence,
Economic Participation and Value Enhanced Care for
adolescents and young adults with Cerebral Palsy



**murdoch
children's
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SUMMARY

Mental health problems are common and often begin in childhood and adolescence. But sometimes it can be hard to identify the signs and symptoms of poor mental health. For people with cerebral palsy, the typically observable signs and symptoms associated with mental health problems may be hidden by the person's physical health concerns. This document is intended to be a mental health toolkit for parents to help identify the early signs of common mental health problems.



Some facts about mental health

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young people with cerebral palsy (aged 5-17 years) have clinically relevant mental health symptoms

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young people with cerebral palsy met thresholds for a mental health problem

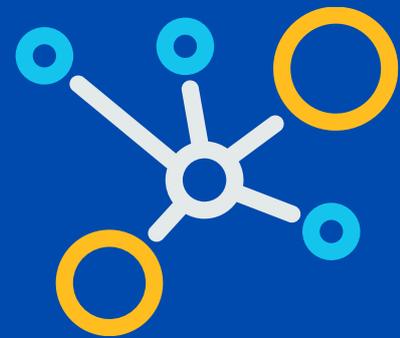


What is the difference between mental health and mental health problems?

Mental health = a healthy, positive mental state where a person feels capable of dealing with normal life stressors.

Mental health problem = disruptions to a person's emotional, social, or mental functioning. This can range from a scale of mild challenges and interruptions (e.g., withdrawing from friends) to severe disruptions (e.g., unable to eat, sleep, get out of bed for several weeks)

7 areas where signs and symptoms of mental health problems may present



1

Social Engagement

You may notice that the young person with cerebral palsy withdraws from previously enjoyed social activities and has become disinterested in attending day programs. You may also notice that they become disengaged with support staff or workers.

Emotional Wellbeing

You may notice the young person with cerebral palsy has recently become more irritable or is easily angered and frustrated. They may cry at things that wouldn't typically make them cry.

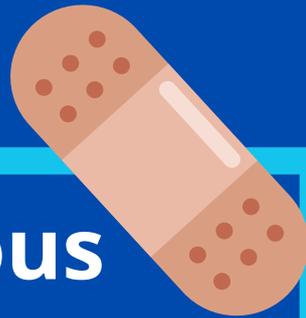
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3

Self-injurious behaviour

You may notice that the young person with cerebral palsy has begun biting, scratching or throwing themselves from their wheelchair. Or they may be doing this more than what is typical for them.



Mental ability

You may notice the young person with cerebral palsy has more difficulty focusing on things, or perhaps they are losing attention more quickly.



4



5

Substance Use

You may notice that the young person with cerebral palsy has begun increasing or decreasing their medications. You may also notice that the young person has started drinking alcohol or using other drugs, or has increased the amount they are drinking/taking.

Behaviour

You may notice the young person with cerebral palsy has started or increased fidgeting and being restless. They may start staring more or have stiff body movements and postures, or you may noticed changes to eating and communication. There may even be changes to their sleep.



6

Physical health

You may notice that the young person with cerebral palsy has increased complaints of pain and fatigue. They may be staying in bed longer or remain in bed for more days than what is typical for them. There may even be changes to the way they breath, it may be faster and/or heavier.



7

What to do if you notice these signs?

If you notice these signs in your young person with cerebral palsy, it may suggest that they have some concerns with their mental health. You should talk about these signs and symptoms with your general practitioner or paediatrician.



Seeking help early can prevent disruptions to mental health

Who can help?

There are many people that can help with the mental health needs of your young person. If you notice the signs and symptoms, you can always talk to your speech pathologist, psychologist, psychiatrist, paediatrician, social worker, or teachers. The important thing to remember is that if you are seeking support, try and find someone who is a good fit for you and your young person. Somebody you trust and feel comfortable with.

It can be difficult to raise these concerns with your general practitioner or paediatrician. Here are a few ways you can start the conversation:

I have noticed a lot of changes in young person's behaviour, I am wondering whether this could be related to their mood?

Over the last two weeks, I've really noticed that my young person has more scratches and has started biting themselves

My young person has always been willing to eat, but lately they don't seem to be eating anything.

My young person is no longer enjoying the things they used to. They are much less motivated to go to school or even outside

It doesn't matter what you say, as long as you start a conversation.

Here are some ways to start a conversation with a young person:

There has been a lot going on lately, I wanted to see how you are going. Are you okay?

You seem to be more upset or angry lately. What is going on? Is there something I can do to help?

It's okay to check in on your young person

I have noticed you seem a little bit off recently and I am worried about you. How are you going at the moment?

Useful Resources

CP-Achieve is a national health and medical research council (NHMRC) funded centre for research excellence that aims to understand and address physical and mental health concerns in people with cerebral palsy. Follow the link below to access additional information and current opportunities for parents, carers, and young people with cerebral palsy.

[CP-ACHIEVE: A Centre of Research Excellence](#)



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It doesn't hurt to check in on your young person's mental health



Speak to a health
professional today
for more
information