

Mental Illness in Children and Adolescents



Our youth are our future. Faith communities need to understand the affects of untreated mental illness in our children and youth. They need to make a commitment to provide education in order to help change societal attitudes about these illnesses of the brain. In breaking the silence, communities of faith can be a source of hospitality, healing and hope for young people and their families.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary...But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew [their] strength;they shall run, and not be weary; [and] they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40: 30a-31b)

Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Problems are Real...

Young people can have mental and emotional problems that are very real, painful, and costly. These problems, often called “disorders,” are a source of stress for the child as well as the family, school, and society at large.

The number of families who are affected by mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders in young people is staggering. It is estimated that as many as one in five children or adolescents may have a mental health problem that can be identified and treated. At least one in twenty --- or as many as 3 million young people --may have a “serious emotional disturbance”. This term refers to a mental health problem that severely disrupts a person’s ability to function socially, academically, and emotionally.

Serious depression, once thought to affect only adults is now known to affect 1 in 50 children. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among youngsters between the ages of 15 and 19, with 18 young people killing themselves daily.

Mental health disorders in children and adolescents are caused by biology, environment, or a mix of both. Examples of biological factors are genetics, chemical imbalances in the body, and damage to the central nervous system. Many factors in a young person’s environment can affect his or her mental health – exposure to violence, extreme stress, loss of an important person.

Tragically, an estimated two-thirds of all young people with mental health problems are not getting the help they need. Most often, children’s and adolescent’s mental health problems are not recognized for what they are and appropriate help is not sought. The stigma associated with mental health problems often acts as a barrier to getting help. It causes isolation and discrimination for young people and their families. (www.samhsa.gov)

For video resource on *Teenage Depression and Suicide*, go to www.MentalHealthMinistries.net.