



Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

## Recognizing mental illness in a loved one



Mental illness affects us all. While one in five people worldwide experience a mental illness at some point in their lives, the rest of us are likely touched by a family member, friend or colleague struggling with a mental health issue. Like physical illnesses, early diagnosis and treatment are essential. With one half of all mental illness beginning by age 14 and 75 percent by age 24, parents are often the first to recognize something is wrong.

### **The warning signs**

While every mental illness has its own characteristic symptoms and people experience any illness in their own way, there are some general warning signs. Some of these include:

#### **In adults**

- Prolonged feelings of hopelessness and sadness
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Deterioration in job performance
- Change in personality
- Extreme mood swings
- Excessive anger, hostility or violent behaviour
- Problems with thinking clearly, concentration, memory
- Excessive fear, worry or anxiety
- Dramatic changes in eating habits or sleeping patterns
- Delusions, grandiose ideas or hallucinations
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Self harm

- Thoughts of suicide

## **Teenagers and young adult**

- Falling grades
- Withdrawing from friends and previously enjoyed activities
- Apathy
- Inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Obsessive thoughts, fears or compulsive behaviours (washing hands, hoarding, rituals, organizing, etc.)
- Poor sleep or appetite
- Excessive complaints of physical problems
- Extreme mood swings
- Defying authority, skipping school, stealing, or damaging property
- Intense fear of gaining weight or obsession with exercise
- Persistent feelings of sadness, negativity, and worthlessness
- Frequent outbursts of anger
- Delusions, grandiose ideas or hallucinations
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Self harm
- Thoughts of suicide or attempted suicide

## **Children**

- Sudden deterioration in academic performance
- Excessive fearfulness or anxiety
- Rituals (unusual behaviours such as counting, tapping or turning around)
- Hyperactivity
- Frequent nightmares
- Persistent disobedience and/or aggressive behaviour
- Frequent temper tantrums

## **Preventing suicide**

It's an alarming statistic that globally, suicide is the leading cause of death for young women aged 15 to 19 and the third most common cause of death for young men after road accidents and violence.

Suicide occurs across social and economic lines. It can be an impulsive act or carefully planned, but the good news is that we can all help by providing emotional support and practical help. Recognizing the warning signs of someone at risk of suicide are perhaps the most important thing loved ones can do.

## **Warning signs of suicide**

- Changes in personality and/or behaviour
- Loss of interest in previously pleasurable activities
- Withdrawal from friends and social activities
- Giving away prized possessions
- Disruptive behaviour
- Substance abuse
- Sudden change in weight
- Apathy about appearance or self-care
- Self-harm or frequent "accidents"
- Talk of suicide. About 80 percent of young people who attempt suicide have told someone of their intentions.

Take any signs of self-harm or talk of suicide seriously and get help immediately. Call your local crisis service or the police, or take the person to the emergency room of your local hospital. Do not leave him or her alone. If the person has attempted suicide and needs medical attention, call 911 or your local emergency services number.

### **Supporting a loved one**

For someone dealing with a mental illness, family and social support is vital to their recovery. You can help by:

- Becoming informed. Find out as much as you can about mental illness, treatment and what services are available in your area.
- Not judging. Judgment can be the one thing someone with a mental health issue fears the most.
- Listening. It takes courage for someone to open up about their mental health challenges.
- Guiding the person to appropriate support(s). Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can provide you with a number of options in your area. Offer to make calls, find information or drive the individual to appointments. But ask first.
- Spend time together. Social isolation is a major risk factor to either developing or worsening many mental illnesses, especially depression. Just hanging out together is great therapy and lets your loved one know you care. Ask how they're doing but also talk about the things you've always talked about.

Helping someone you care about deal with any illness – physical or mental – can be challenging. Remember to not ignore your own physical and mental well-being and to contact your EFAP if you need information, support or resources.

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