

CHILDREN AND MENTAL HEALTH

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What causes mental illness?

(NC)—Lots of myths surround mental illness. For instance, many still think that it's something that can be cured simply by 'toughening up' or by adopting a better outlook on life. In fact, mental illness is not caused by 'moral' weakness, and it's clearly not something that people 'choose' to have. Mental illness is a diagnosable illness that requires treatment, just like diabetes.

While the causes of mental illness are not well understood, most research suggests that it results from a chemical disturbance in the brain. Many factors may contribute to this: heredity, genetics, stress, recreational drug use may all contribute to the onset of mental illness.

Although research is still in its infancy, there now exist many effective treatments for those who suffer from mental health disorders. In most cases these treatments make a significant, positive contribution to quality of life, and the earlier a condition is identified the better the treatment outcome.

More information on mental illness and how a new book called "Catch a Falling Star: A Tale from the Iris the Dragon Series" is helping parents identify and understand early onset mental illness visit www.iristhedragon.com.

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Early diagnosis improves treatment

(NC)—Popular myths have led many to believe that mental health disorders are untreatable. As a result, a lot of people who suffer don't seek help. In fact most mental disorders are treatable. The treatment success rate for schizophrenia is 60 percent, 65 percent for major depression, and 80 percent for bipolar disorder. The success rate for treatments of heart disease, on the other hand, is only 40 - 50 percent.

A variety of treatments are available to improve symptoms. In fact, for most mental disorders there is more than one proven treatment. Most fall under two general categories, psychosocial and pharmacological. The combination of the two — known as multimodal therapy

— can sometimes be even more effective than each individually.

Although there is a wide range of treatments, the stigma and fear associated with mental illness prevents many from seeking help. The longer mental illness goes untreated the more serious, and less treatable, the illness can become. Early identification and intervention of mental illness is key to getting your life back on track.

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Book helps families deal with mental illness

(NC)—More people than ever are taking care of their bodies through proper nutrition and exercise. They realize that the human body is a finely tuned machine that needs on-going maintenance. The same however cannot be said for the mind. Without proper care, our brains can suffer from degeneration and, in some cases, mental disorder.

Author Gayle Grass emphasizes the importance of healthy brains in her new children's illustrated book called "Catch a Falling Star: A Tale from the Iris the Dragon Series". Intended to create awareness and act as a positive tool for dialogue within families, "Catch a Falling Star," deals with mental health and illness, the importance of early diagnosis, and how to handle the unfounded stigma.

Endorsed by some of Canada's top child psychiatrists, "Catch a Falling Star" teaches families that every child at times encounters emotions or behavior that can cause problems in their lives. "This book has an important and powerful message - we must listen to our children, and respond with wisdom and support to their fears and worries, and make use of available specialists to reduce suffering and distress," says Dr. Joe Beitchman, Clinical Director for the Child Psychiatry Program at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

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CATCH A FALLING STAR

A Tale from
The Iris the Dragon Series



Gayle Grass
Coral Hault

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How to recognize mental illness in children

(NC)—Learning that something is wrong with your child can be a frightening experience. Frightening and embarrassing. In fact, the reason that many fail to have their children's behavior diagnosed is that they fear the results may reflect poorly on them as parents.

Getting over this selfish fear of diagnosis is an important initial step if children are to receive the full benefit of treatment, because the earlier help arrives the better the prognosis. The main hope for children at risk of serious mental illness lies in early detection.

Here is a brief list of disorder symptoms common in young children:

ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) — The child can't pay attention to details, is often caught daydreaming, dislikes or is reluctant to engage in activities that require sustained attention, is easily distracted, forgetful, disorganized, often does not finish school

work (work may be full of mistakes or turned in late), doesn't follow through or listen to instructions, displays extreme physical agitation, intrudes on others or resorts to inappropriate behavior when prompted

Oppositional Defiant Disorder — The child is negative, hostile, does not comply with requests made by adults, is persistently arguing with adults, obstinate, feels entitled to make unreasonable demands, is touchy, resentful, blames others when caught doing something wrong, displays cruelty towards animals, bullying, is aggressive, destructive, deceitful, and/or lacks remorse for antisocial behavior.

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Stigma still getting in the way of treatment

(NC)—Mental illness is something that many people still talk about in hushed voices. Those afflicted are frequently embarrassed about their condition, worrying that they will be seen as 'weak' or that others will somehow think less of them. Unfortunately this stigma often stands in the way of open dialogue and understanding. As a result, many sufferers go untreated and/or are subjected to ridicule and discrimination.

Given that so many suffer from mental illness, it's ironic that so few are willing to openly discuss it, and that many still considered the affliction to be "abnormal". Here are some more mental health eye-openers:

§ Major depression is now the world's leading cause of disability

§ The treatment success rate for schizophrenia is 60 percent, 65 percent for major depression, and 80 percent for bipolar disorder. This compares favorably to rates for heart disease of only 40 - 50 percent

§ Stigma and fear still prevent many from seeking out appropriate care.

§ The media and popular culture continues to discriminate against people with mental illness by painting them as crazed and dangerous, or focusing on isolated violent incidents. The facts, however, prove otherwise. For example, those who suffer from schizophrenia are no more prone to violent behavior than any other member of the general population.

§ Early intervention and identification of mental illness can help prevent decades of suffering for both patients and families.

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How to keep your kid's brain healthy

(NC)—According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, approximately one in five children between the ages of four and 16 have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder. If untreated, such conditions can lead to drug addiction, dropping out of school and, in more severe cases, criminal behavior.

Until recently, doctors and researchers rarely considered that children could suffer from mental disorders. But studies have shown that many do in fact live through a lot of the same frightening symptoms experienced by adults.

One thing parents can do to reduce the chances that their children will suffer from mental illness is to provide a positive social and emotional environment. Here is a list of things that parents can do to help foster healthy mental development in their children:

- Give lots of unconditional love. Play with them often.
- Remind them of their achievements frequently. This helps boost their self confidence and self esteem.
- Provide them with the opportunity to play with other children by setting up play dates and enrolling them in group activities.
- Encourage teachers and care givers to be supportive and aware of your kids' emotional states and needs.
- Provide safe and secure surroundings.
- Offer appropriate guidance and discipline. Enforce limits. Explain consequences.

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One in five stricken with mental illness Early identification key to effective treatment

(NC)—According to the Canadian Mental Health Association an estimated one in five Canadians will be affected by a mental illness at some time during their lives. Here are some more interesting facts about mental illness:

§ Mental illnesses are more common than cancer, diabetes, or heart disease.

§ Mental illnesses are physical brain disorders that profoundly disrupt a person's ability to think, feel, and relate to others and their environment.

§ One in every five families is affected in their lifetime by severe mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and major depression.

§ One in ten children/adolescents have mental illnesses severe enough to cause some level of impairment.

§ 80% of children who require care for mental health problems do not receive the help they need, not so much because it is unavailable, but because parents don't recognize the need for help or are unaware that it is available.

§ Early intervention and identification can help to prevent decades of suffering for both patients and families.

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Stressing solutions for stress

(NC)—Modern life is faster and more stressful than ever. To cope, many resort to dreaming of their happy childhood days. But for a surprising number of people, this kind solace is unavailable. Childhood can be a very difficult time. Children experience stress just like adults do, and this needs to be recognized. Family conflict, domestic violence, divorce, constant school changes, new neighborhoods and child care arrangements, peer pressure, and bullying all contribute to childhood angst.

Here are a few things that parents can do to help their children deal with stress:

- Monitor and modify their own stress levels
- Keep communication lines open. Let your kids know what's going on
- Encourage friendships by scheduling play dates, sleepovers, and other fun activities
- Remember that children need quiet down time to as well as time to play

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