

Understanding Disabilities: A Behavioral Health FAQ Sheet

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Introduction

More than ever, the need for education on mental health and wellness is pressing. At some point, many of us experience mental health concerns in varied ways, whether that be through experiencing stress, overcoming grief after losing a loved one, managing a learning disability, or undergoing treatment for conditions like ADHD, depression or anxiety. As the field of mental health grows, it is important to be aware of changing terminology and trends. The aim of this Frequently Asked Question, or FAQ, sheet is to answer common questions related to behavioral health and identify easy-to-implement strategies for managing common health concerns.

FAQ's

What is behavioral health?¹

Behavioral health is an area of study that addresses mental and emotional health, developmental delays and disabilities, psychiatric conditions, addictions, and marriage and family crises. Behavioral health is commonly used over *mental health* as it is more inclusive of a variety of mental, emotional, social and developmental health concerns. Behavioral health specialists include psychologists, licensed professional counselors, therapists, social workers, physicians and more who aim to prevent, treat and help clients learn strategies to manage behavioral health concerns and find a path towards recovery.

Is there a difference between behavioral health and mental health?^{1,2}

Although used interchangeably, there is a difference between behavioral health and mental health. Behavioral health is an umbrella term that refers to any behavioral problem that has an impact on health. Behavioral problems include behaviors brought on by mental or physical health conditions (e.g., illnesses or disabilities), stress-related coping behaviors, and substance abuse. Mental health is a component of behavioral health and refers to one's psychological state of well-being. The approaches to mental health care and behavioral health care also differ from one another. Mental health care provides support for those diagnosed with or at risk for certain mental illnesses to help them manage and live healthier, more productive lives. Behavioral health care focuses comprehensively on the treatment and management of health disorders and associated behavioral health problems. Both approaches may use integrated care plans to provide intervention through a team of health professionals, such as medical doctors, therapists, social workers, and other rehabilitation or community health services.

Why is behavioral health important?³

Any physical, mental, relationship or environmental challenge affects how we think, feel and behave as we work through difficulties. Positive behavioral health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and through adulthood, as it impacts all aspects of our health and equips us with the ability to:

- Cope with the stresses of life.
- Make good choices.
- Work through tough emotions and challenges.
- Adapt to change.
- Be physically healthy.
- Have good relationships.
- Make meaningful contributions to your community.
- Work productively.
- Realize your full potential.

What are factors that influence behavioral health challenges?^{3,4}

There are several factors that influence one's behavioral health.

- **Genetics** — Biological factors, such as genes or genetic history passed down through generations, influence brain development and predispose for certain disorders and disabilities.
- **Life experiences** — Social factors — such as trauma, neglect or dysfunction in the home — can shape early development and lead to mental health problems or developmental delays.
- **Accessibility** — Environmental factors — such as being unable to access resources due to geographic location, affordability or cultural beliefs — may lead to a behavioral health issue, which left unaddressed can intensify health challenges later in life.

What strategies will help to promote children's behavioral health?⁵⁻⁷

Be proactive! While behavioral health challenges are a natural part of growing up, you can be proactive to help yourself and others achieve appropriate milestones in social, emotional and intellectual development.

- Promote early attachment between children and other caregivers.
- Engage in early learning activities and play with children.
- Encourage good friendships/peer relationships.
- Model healthy relationships and conflict resolution strategies.
- Provide appropriate and consistent discipline and boundaries.
- Serve as an active participant in the partnership between school and family.
- Support school policies and practices to reduce bullying.
- Demonstrate coping skills and problem-solving skills by using them in your own life.

Additionally, there are several strategies that you can use with your family to help navigate life's challenges.

- **Drop the stigma.** While talking about emotions and hardships may feel shameful for some, not working through tough moments can intensify mental health. Rather than ignoring challenging moments, problem solve ways to pull through. Rely on your network of friends, mentors or other professionals to find strategies or resources to help. There's a lot of power in naming the challenge, to tame it!
- **Build emotional intelligence skills.** Educate on social and emotional learning (SEL) to equip children with a toolbox of strategies for understanding and managing emotions, productively resolving conflict, and setting goals. Visit CASEL.org to learn more.
- **Be physically active.** There is a strong link between physical activity and mental wellness. Involve the whole family in walking together after dinner, going to the park, hiking, or design and compete in backyard obstacle courses.
- **Connect with others.** Find ways to interact with close friends and family, in-person or virtually over Skype or Zoom. Encourage youth to participate in positive youth experiences or organizations, such as team sports, band, youth groups or 4-H clubs.
- **Serve the community.** Develop a sense of meaning and purpose in life by involving yourself and the family in community service opportunities. Pay attention to their interests and create ways for youth to develop skills to make a difference.
- **Sleep.** Healthy brain development and general health relies upon getting enough sleep. Children (6-12 years) need 9 to 12 hours of sleep each night, teens (13-18 years) need 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night, and young adults and adults (18-plus years) need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.⁷
- **Develop a coping toolbox.** Identify several coping techniques to help with managing stress and overcoming hardship. Try out mindfulness (see mindful.org) or text therapy (talkspace.com) to conveniently and privately connect with a professional.

Resources

- SAMHSA Find Treatment — findtreatment.gov
- Talkspace — talkspace.com
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) — casel.org
- Mindfulness — mindful.org
- National Helpline — 1-800-622-HELP (4357)

Where can I find more information?

If you are interested in learning more, find additional fact sheets as part of our **Understanding Disabilities** series.

[W 947-A Understanding Disabilities: An Introductory Guide](#)

[W 947-C Understanding Disabilities: Intellectual and Learning Disabilities](#)

[W 947-D Understanding Disabilities: Screening for Disabilities in Children](#)

[W 947-E Understanding Disabilities: Respectful Etiquette and Language Guidelines](#)

[W 947-F Understanding Disabilities: Responsive Care](#)

[W 947-G Understanding Disabilities: Anxiety in Children and Youth](#)

[W 947-H Understanding Disabilities: Sensory Processing Disorder](#)

References

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