




# A Child's Mental Health

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## Overview

- Recognize signs and symptoms of mental health problems that may impact children
- Understand the 4 A's (Attachment, ACEs, ADHD, and Anxiety)
- Strategies to effectively work with students with mental health conditions

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## What are Mental Disorders in Children?

Affects the child's thinking, emotional state, and behavior

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Disrupts the child's ability to:

Attend school/Head Start/Daycare	Complete daily activities	Develop healthy relationships
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### Why is Children's Mental Health Important



Mental health problems in children are common.

75% of mental health problems develop during childhood and adolescence.

The child's brain is developing at a rapid rate.

Stigma and Culture

Professional help is not always available or desired

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### Commonly Diagnosed Mental Disorders in Children

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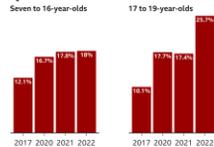
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### Mental Health Changes Since COVID-19



Percentage of children and young people with a probable mental disorder



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### Physical Signs and Symptoms of a Child MH Disorder

- Frequent headaches/stomachaches
- Sleepy, tired
- Increased hunger or thirst
- Unkempt, disheveled
- Appear tense, worried




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### Behavioral Signs and Symptoms of a Child MH Disorder

- Difficulty separating at drop-off; lots of absences
- Frequent visits to nurse's office with vague physical complaints
- Difficulty participating in class (hand raising, head on desk)
- Tantrums and anger outbursts
- Reassurance seeking (If I eat this will I get sick? Is this ok to do?)
- Perfectionism (lots of erasing, ripping paper if made a mistake)
- Distractibility and hyperactivity
- Withdrawing from activities, peers, or school
- Changes in eating/sleeping habits
- Showing excessive fear of something (dogs, dark)

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### Emotional Signs and Symptoms of a Child MH Disorder

- Excessive irritability or anger
- Mood swings
- Sadness, tearfulness
- Excessive anxiety or worry
- Excessive pessimism
- Low self-esteem
- Restlessness/tension




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### Cognitive Distortions

Black and white thinking – thinking only in extremes “this is the worst day of my life”

Fortune telling – predicting things will turn out badly

Worst possible outcome – imaging the worst and not being able to handle it

Ignoring the positive – only focusing on the negative

Labeling – using a single negative word to describe ourselves

Mindreading – we assume we know what others are thinking

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### When Symptoms Become Diagnosable



**Frequency**  
Child experiences symptoms most of the day or many times per day



**Duration**  
Symptoms have been present for a certain amount of time



**Impairment**  
Symptoms get in the way of school performance, relationships, or participation in usual activities

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### Risk Factors

- Stressful life events (moving, divorce)
- Abuse or trauma
- Chronic medical conditions
- Poverty
- Family history of mental health challenges
- Poor parent-child communication
- Harsh or inconsistent parenting
- Poor peer relationships or isolation
- Parental substance abuse
- Learning disorders/academic difficulties

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Protective Factors

- Regular attendance
- Emotional literacy
- Good social support
- Economic security
- Activities outside the home
- Feeling close to at least one adult
- Ability to control and regulate emotions
- Social problem-solving skills

- Having and using coping strategies
- Flexibility
- High self-esteem
- Good problem-solving skills
- Spirituality
- Consistent home routine
- Support from family, friends and clergy

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NAS in West Virginia

**Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)**  
A pregnant woman's drug use during pregnancy causes an infant to go through withdrawal after birth.

Children with NAS may have:  
Vision and hearing issues  
Feeding and gastrointestinal issues  
Fine and gross motor delays  
Sensory processing problems (may present as behavior issues)  
Executive functioning problems

**NAS data for 2017 shows the overall incidence rate was 50.6 cases per 1,000 live births (5.06%) for West Virginia residents (WV DHR, 2017), highest in the nation. The national average was 7 cases per 1,000.**

West Virginia: Rate of NAS per 1,000 Newborn Hospitalizations by All NAS, 2009 to 2021

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), State Inpatient Databases (SID) 2009 to 2021. (All variables were as of 10/16/2022). Abbreviations: NAS, neonatal abstinence syndrome.

Children born in 2017 started Kindergarten this school year

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The Four A's

- Attachment
- ACES
- ADHD
- Anxiety

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### How is an attachment formed?



Infant is upset or scared (limbic activates) >  
 adult soothes (builds connection) >  
 limbic system calms >  
 relays safety to prefrontal cortex

- Caregiver offers warmth, comfort, food and infant learns to trust that their needs will be met. Secure Attachment is created.

*"Prefrontal Cortex is developed through a secure attachment relationship"*



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### SOME "SYMPTOMS" SPECIFIC TO THE TYPE OF ATTACHMENT DISORDER

<p><b>ANXIOUS</b>                  overly clingy                  superficially compliant                  "sell their souls" for acceptance                  openly destructive if told "no"</p>	<p><b>AVOIDANT</b>                  isolated &amp; don't care                  feel omnipotent, over independent                  sullen, openly oppositional in a passive-aggressive way</p>
<p><b>AMBIVALENT</b>                  openly angry and defiant                  destructive – things, people, pets                  can't give and receive affection unless they want something                  dangerous impulsive risk takers</p>	<p><b>DISORGANISED</b>                  "variety of symptoms- behaviour is grossly disorganised, bizarre and has features of the other 3 at various times often for no apparent reason"</p>

Taken from "Children Who Shock and Surprise: A Guide to Attachment Disorders" by Elizabeth Randolph

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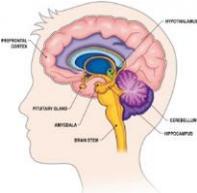


### Why do students with chronic stress end up in the office?

Chronic Toxic Stress leads to an overactive limbic system and immature pre-frontal cortex.  
 The pre-frontal cortex is responsible for:

- Focusing Attention
- Predicting Consequences
- Impulse Control
- Anticipating Events
- Managing Emotional Reactions

**Do you know any students with an overactive limbic system and immature pre-frontal cortex? Is that how we view them?**



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### ACEs at School

- ACEs are the single greatest predictor for health, attendance and behavior.
- ACEs are the second strongest predictor for academic failure, after special education status.
- **56%** of children with an ACE score of **4+** had **learning and behavior problems** in school compared with **only 3%** of children with an ACE score of **ZERO**.



Source: Burke, N.J., Helmer, J.L., Soto, B.G., Warren, C.F. & Cannon, V.C. (Jan. 2018). "The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on the Pediatric Population." Child Abuse and Neglect, 75, No. 6.

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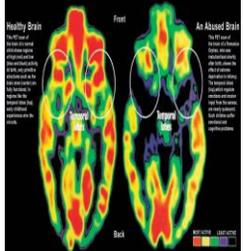
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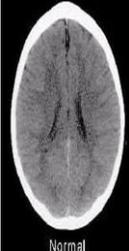
### Brain Development Disrupted

**Healthy Brain**



**An Abused Brain**





Normal



Extreme Neglect

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### Trauma Symptoms:

Sleep disturbance	Weight gain or loss	Failure to thrive	Enuresis, Encopresis, Constipation	Hair loss
Poor control of chronic disease	Developmental regression	School failure or absenteeism	Aggression	Poor impulse control
Frequent crying	Restricted affect or numbing	High risk behavior in adolescents	Unexplained somatic complaints	Depression
	Anxiety	Interpersonal conflict		

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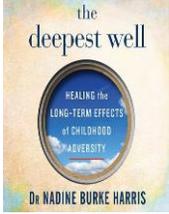
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"What is in the Well?"


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## ADHD Symptoms

**Primarily Inattentive Type:**

- Doesn't pay attention to detail
- Makes careless mistakes
- Has trouble paying attention
- Has difficulty following instructions
- Easily distracted
- Forgetful

**Primarily Hyperactive/Impulsive Type:**

- Fidgets
- Squirms in chair
- Runs talks, and climbs excessively
- Blurts out answers
- Has trouble waiting and taking turns

\*\* The combined type displays symptoms of both the Primarily Inattentive Type and the Primarily Hyperactive/Impulsive Type.

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### TRAUMA

- Feelings of fear, helplessness, uncertainty, vulnerability
- Increased arousal, eagerness and agitation
- Avoidance of reminders of trauma
- Irritability, quick to anger
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Dissociation, feelings of unreality or being "outside of one's body"
- Continually feeling on alert for threat or danger
- Unusually reckless, aggressive or self-destructive behavior

### ADHD

- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Struggling to follow instructions
- Difficulty with organization
- Fidgeting or squirming
- Difficulty waiting or taking turns
- Talking excessively
- Losing things necessary for tasks or activities
- Interrupting or intruding upon others

### OVERLAP

- Difficulty concentrating and learning in school
- Easily distracted
- Often doesn't seem to listen
- Disorganization
- Hyperactive
- Restless
- Difficulty sleeping

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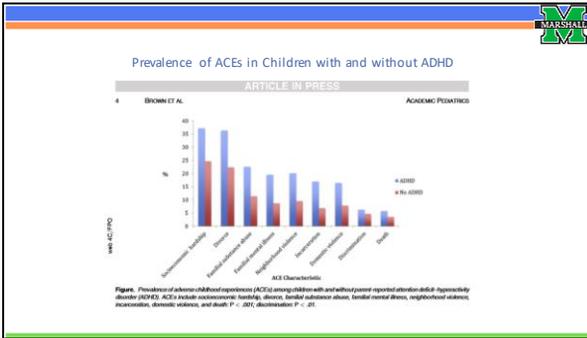
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### Why is Self-Regulation Important?

- We cannot learn if we are in a stressed state.
- Before we can teach a curriculum, we must teach regulation.

Students who lack self-regulation are 77% less engaged in school. Children with a mental health issue with a strong connection to their parents are over 5x more likely to know how to self-regulate.  
 January 2022 issue of *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*.

The **ZONES** of Regulation®

BLUE ZONE	GREEN ZONE	YELLOW ZONE	RED ZONE
Sad Tired Bored Missing Lonely	Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to learn	Frustrated Bored Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	Meltdown Screaming Yelling/Hitting Blame Out of Control

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### TIPS FOR REGULATION

Provide a weighted pencil	Self-Talk	Play soothing music	Self-Distraction
Play catch	Let students choose where to work	Keep student's hands busy	Deep Breaths
Check-ins			

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### Strategies to Improve Symptoms at School

- Include books in your library that have characters with big feelings to normalize student's experiences
- Create a worry box for kids to leave their worries at the door
- Have a weekly class mantra or positive affirmation
- Teach mindfulness activities such as breathing and "brain breaks" in between lessons.
- Play music that focuses on self-acceptance and esteem
- Ask older students what song they relate to right now
- Don't be afraid to take a reset, the are good for everyone!

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### Anxious versus Defiant Behavior



- Anxious- Connection and Explanation
- Defiance- Clarity and Absolutes

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## The 5 C's for Adults to Use

Celebration

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## Building Skills for Success

More of what works, less of what doesn't	Look for progress, even small	Visual cues	Verbal prompts
Simplify instructions	STRENGTH BASED - notice efforts	Allow extra time for packing up	Set aside time for organization (desk, locker, notebooks)

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## Executive Functioning

Coordinates thoughts, feelings, and actions	3-year lag for students with ADHD	More challenges than strengths
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### Resources

- <https://wvde.us/reclaimwv>
- <https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ReClaimWV-Toolkit-FEB2020.pdf>
- <https://www.help4wv.com/>
- <https://www.wvaces.org/>
- <http://preventsuicidewv.org/>

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### QR Code



Thank you so much for all that you do for our students!

We appreciate each of you!

Take care of yourself this summer!

Tiffany

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