



PAL Parent/Professional Advocacy League

Massachusetts State Chapter, Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

Mental illness affects all people, including children. In fact, more children suffer from psychiatric illness than from leukemia, diabetes and AIDS combined. In the United States, 1 in 10 children and adolescents suffer from mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment. Yet, in any given year, it is estimated that fewer than 1 in 5 of these children receives needed treatment.

The Prevalence of Mental Illness and Children

- In Massachusetts alone more than 110,000 children and adolescents will likely need mental health support services this year.
- 1 in 5 children have a diagnosable mental health disorder. 1 in 10 has a serious emotional disturbance that disrupts his/her life at home, in school or in the community.
- More than 3 million children suffer from attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder.
- 1 in every 33 children and 1 in 8 adolescents has depression. Nationally, 2 million adolescents suffer from depression
- About half of all young people with AD/HD also have oppositional or conduct disorder. One-fourth have an anxiety disorder. One-third have depression and one-fifth have a learning disability.
- From 5% to 20% of all children have anxiety disorder, making it the *most common* mental health problem children face.

The Devastating Effects of Mental Illness For Children and Families

- Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds and the 6th leading cause of death for 5-14 year olds. Between 1980 and 1996, the suicide rate among children ages 10-14 increased by 100 percent.
- One fifth of Massachusetts adolescents have seriously considered suicide and 1 in 10 have made an actual suicide attempt.
- About half of the children with anxiety disorders develop another disorder, such as depression.
- Once a child experiences an episode of depression, he or she is at risk of having another episode within the next 5 years.
- Anorexia and bulimia have the highest death rate of any childhood psychiatric illness.
- 50 to 75% of incarcerated young offenders nationwide are estimated to have a diagnosable mental health disorder. Experts believe that the statistics for Massachusetts are similar.