

*Quick Assessment:*

# Could Your Child or Teen Benefit from Mental Health Treatment?

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Work through this assessment with your child to determine if they might benefit from working with a mental health professional to overcome mental health challenges, receive treatment and discover a pathway to a happier, healthier life.



# A Note for Parents and Caregivers

Children and teens sometimes exhibit strong emotions or behaviors that can make parenting more challenging and leave loved ones unsure of what to do or where to turn for help. It can be heartbreaking to watch your child struggle with intense emotions, fluctuating moods and disruptive behaviors because you want them to be happy and successful. Sometimes, children don't themselves

understand their own behaviors or emotions, and may not know how to identify the triggers causing them to struggle. In some cases, these behaviors can indicate an underlying mental health need and a mental health professional can be a valuable resource to help your child work through these struggles. This guide and the assessment at the end can help you determine if your child's feelings or behaviors may be tied to a deeper mental health need and what you can do to seek help for them.

The information contained in this quick assessment should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of a mental health professional.



If your child is experiencing thoughts of suicide and/or self-harm, please contact 911, your primary physician, a local community mental health center, or the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)** immediately.

If you're in Kansas or Missouri, contact our children's psychiatric hospitals at **(913) 890-7468** to learn more about the services we provide and how we can help your child and family.

# When Might Challenging Behaviors Require Attention?

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Behavioral challenges may arise as children and teens are growing and learning. Youth are pushing boundaries, influenced by others and learning social cues, which is normal and healthy. But when these behaviors become harmful to a child or others and/or are persistent, severe, and disruptive to their schoolwork, social settings and home life, it might be time to seek professional help.

Also, behavioral challenges can be a result of an underlying mental illness. Your child may be experiencing depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, or other struggles that are causing them to act out or withdrawal. And sometimes, the behavior might stem from a traumatic or stressful experience the youth has experienced. If mental health needs or the impacts of trauma are left unaddressed, there can be long-term effects on a youth's development, social competence, health and wellbeing.



# Understanding Behaviors & Triggers

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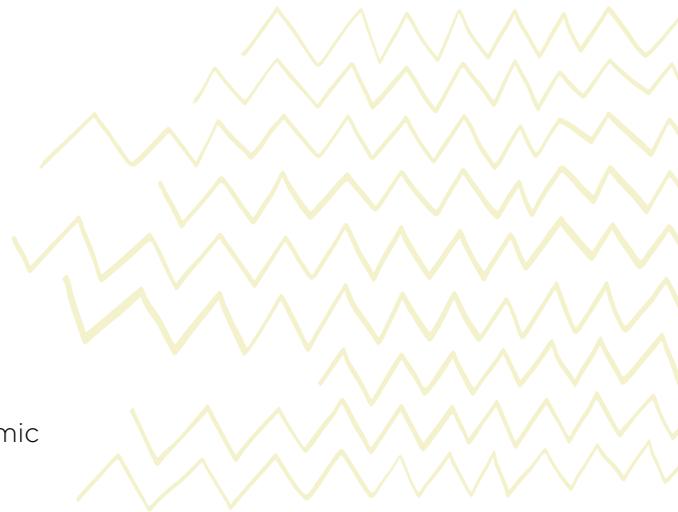
Behavior is often a child or teen's way of trying to communicate. Through behaviors, a youth is telling you something about themselves and/or their situation. For example, here's what some common emotions or behaviors may mean:

- **Anger/Frustration:** The child is unable or unsure how to do something or can't find the words to express what they need or want from you.
- **Seeking Attention:** The child wants interaction. They want you to play, talk or read with them so they feel emotionally supported.
- **Disobedience:** As children grow, they experiment with independence and discover the boundaries of rules and authority. Children may be exploring how much freedom or control they have in a given situation.
- **Fidgeting, Not Listening, Being Distracted:** The youth may have energy that needs to be expended through physical play or exercise so they can focus on school or other tasks.

While many of these behaviors are normal parts of child development, a child who has experienced trauma may have a different, more serious underlying source behind their behaviors. It's estimated that 2 out of 3 youth will be experiencing trauma before the age of 16.

## Childhood trauma includes things like:

- Abuse
- Neglect
- A deceased, mentally ill or incarcerated parent
- Parental drug use
- Having parents who are divorced
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Bullying
- Natural disasters
- Effects of isolation or anxiety from the COVID-19 pandemic
- Discrimination based on race, gender, religion, sexual orientation/identification, disability, or other attributes



If your child has experienced one or more of these traumas or a different traumatic experience, professional treatment can help them process the experience(s) and heal.

# Behavior and Mental Health

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Some behavioral challenges in children and teens may arise from underlying mental health needs. Children and teens are at risk of experiencing mental illness just like adults.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 13–20% of children in the United States experience a mental health disorder each year. Depression is one of the top five mental disorders in children and teens and, left untreated, can put youth at risk for thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people ages 10 to 34.

Depression isn't just sadness. Depression is a persistent feeling of sadness or hopelessness and the timeline for how long these feelings last is different for everyone.

## Common symptoms of depression:

- Loss of interest in activities
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Feelings of hopelessness and/or sadness
- Loss of self-worth and self-esteem
- Suicidal thoughts



If you believe that your child is experiencing depression or any other mental health condition, it's important to reach out to a mental health professional or doctor who can provide support and guidance.

# Strategies for Responding to Challenging Behaviors or Mental Health Needs

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Here are strategies and solutions for managing challenging behaviors and circumstances brought on by underlying mental health needs:

**1.**

## **Respond calmly.**

Do not express your own heightened emotions. Rather, breathe deeply before responding to the situation and speak quietly with your child. When you remain calm, consistent and neutral, you can help to deescalate the situation before it turns into an argument.

**2.**

## **Prioritize the challenges your child is experiencing.**

Some behaviors need more immediate attention than others, for example, if it's causing physical harm to your child or others. Some challenges may not be as concerning and can be addressed at a later time or will naturally resolve themselves through the child's development.

**3.**

## **Reward your child for obedient and respectful behavior with positive attention or praise.**

Tell them that you're proud of them and what it was about their behavior that you appreciated. Reward them by doing their favorite activity together.

**4.**

## **Seek professional help.**

If needed, turn to a doctor or mental health professional for help in working through your child's behavioral or mental health needs.

# When to Seek Professional Help

Children and teens experiencing depression, anxiety, the impacts of trauma, suicidal thoughts, anger, or other mental health needs can often develop disruptive and/or dangerous behaviors. These behaviors can be difficult for parents and caregivers to safely manage on their own.

## Here are some situations in which you should seek help from a mental health professional:

- Your child is causing physical harm to themselves or others.
- Your child is showing generalized unhappiness, feeling unliked or not having friends.
- Your child displays persistent disrespect of authority at home, school or in extracurricular settings.
- Your child's behavior is challenging and your efforts to manage it are not working.
- Your child has experienced a traumatic event as described earlier in this guide.



# Quick 10 Question Assessment

For many parents and caregivers, deciding how best to help a youth struggling with mental health is confusing and scary. Here is a short assessment you can complete with your child or teen to help determine if they may need help from a professional.

This test is based on the Beck Depression Inventory and the Children's Bureau bulletin on "*Supporting Brain Development in Traumatized Children and Youth*." Please note that test results do not represent a professional diagnosis and that this test is for educational purposes. If you have any concerns about your child's wellbeing or need additional information about professional services, you should follow up with a mental health professional or doctor.

**Directions:** Working with your child, circle the answer they feel most accurately applies to their feelings over the past two weeks, including today. If several statements apply, circle the highest number.

## Q1: Feelings of sadness

1. I do not feel sad
2. I feel sad much of the time
3. I am sad all of the time
4. I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it

## Q2: Suicidal thoughts or wishes

1. I don't have thoughts about killing myself
2. I have thoughts of killing myself
3. I would like to kill myself
4. I would kill myself if I had the chance

## Q3: Loss of interest

1. I have not lost interest in other people or activities
2. I am less interested in other people or things than before
3. I have lost most of my interest in other people or things
4. It's hard to get interested in anything

## Q4: Irritability

1. I am no more irritable than usual
2. I am more irritable than usual
3. I am much more irritable than usual
4. I am irritable all the time

### **Q5: Tiredness or fatigue**

1. I am no more tired or fatigued than usual
2. I get more tired or fatigued more easily than usual
3. I am too tired or fatigued to do a lot of the things I used to do
4. I am too tired or fatigued to do most of the things I used to do

### **Q6: Aggression or violence**

1. I do not feel the desire to be violent or abusive
2. I have thoughts about being violent or abusive
3. Though rarely, I have become violent or abusive in the past
4. I sometimes become violent or abusive

### **Q7: Negative peer pressure**

1. I do not give in to negative peer pressure or am not bullied
2. I sometimes give in to negative peer pressure or am bullied
3. I often give in to negative peer pressure or am bullied
4. I sometimes bully others or exert negative peer pressure on my friends

### **Q8: School performance**

1. I am doing well at school and respect my teachers
2. I am doing OK at school and do not typically have behavior problems at school
3. I am not doing well at school and sometimes I get in trouble for my behavior there
4. I am failing some classes at school and/or I often get in trouble for my behavior at school

### **Q9: Changes in sleeping pattern**

1. I have not experienced any change in my sleeping patterns
2. I sleep somewhat more/less than usual
3. I sleep a lot more/less than usual
4. I sleep most of the day OR wake up 1-2 hours early and can't get back to sleep

### **Q10: Conflict**

1. Most relationships in my life are positive
2. I rarely have or cause conflict with peers or family members
3. I sometimes have or cause conflict with some peers or some family members
4. I often have conflict or regularly cause conflict with peers or family members

# Scoring the 10-Question Assessment

**Directions:** Add the total number of your circled answers.

My total score:

## Score 10-20

While your child or teen might be feeling sad or displaying some challenging behaviors now, based on these test answers he or she is not likely exhibiting signs of depression or other serious problems. Here are some tips to help your child through this time:

- Be available for help and advice when needed & create a safe environment where your child can feel comfortable sharing his/ her emotions.
- Help your child resolve conflicts, solve problems and understand his or her changing emotions
- Promote physical activity, healthy eating, and getting the right amount of sleep.
- Support healthy friendships and encourage appropriate social activities.
- Establish rules that are fair and consistent.

## Score 21-30

Your child's score falls in the moderate range and a mental or behavioral health challenge could be affecting his/her life. This could be stopping your child from doing things he or she enjoys. While this test isn't a diagnosis, it may be time to seek professional help.

## Score 31+

Your child's score falls in the high range and it sounds like he or she is experiencing a mental or behavioral health challenge. It is recommended that you seek professional help. There are many different treatment options available that can help your child heal, learn and feel better.

**If your child is experiencing thoughts of suicide and/or self-harm, please contact 911, your primary physician, a local community mental health center, or the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK \(8255\)](https://www.nimh.gov/helpinaneurosis/1-800-273-TALK) immediately.**

**If you're in Kansas or Missouri, contact our children's psychiatric hospitals at [\(913\) 890-7468](tel:913-890-7468) to learn more about the services we provide and how we can help your child and family.**

# Help Is Only a Call Away

There are many types of treatment available and finding the right one for your child or teen is important. If you have additional questions or would like to talk to someone about receiving services from KVC, contact your local KVC office. We offer a range of behavioral health services which are designed to promote healthy brain development, build resilience, and help our clients learn healthy skills to manage difficult emotions and move forward into a healthier and happier future.

In Kansas or Missouri, contact  
In Kentucky, contact  
In Nebraska, contact  
In West Virginia, contact

**KVC Hospitals** at  
**KVC Kentucky** at  
**KVC Nebraska** at  
**KVC West Virginia** at

(913) 890-7468 or [kvchospitals.org](http://kvchospitals.org)  
(859) 254-1035 or [kvcky.org](http://kvcky.org)  
(402) 498-4700 or [kvcnebraska.org](http://kvcnebraska.org)  
(304) 347-9818 or [kvcwv.org](http://kvcwv.org)

If you're in another state, call us at **(913) 322-4900** or [kvc.org](http://kvc.org)

Visit our Resource Library for more free, downloadable guides and tools offering parenting tips, stories from real foster parents, education about mental health and suicide prevention, uplifting success stories, and more.

[www.kvc.org/resourcelibrary](http://www.kvc.org/resourcelibrary)



The  of  
our work is  
*helping people.*



**At KVC, we envision a world where every person is safe and connected to a strong family and a healthy community. Every day we work toward that goal by:**

- Giving youth the caring attention and clinical treatment they need to prevent suicide and other mental health crises
- Providing 24/7 support to children rescued from abuse and neglect, partnering with caring relatives and foster families so children can heal from trauma
- Stabilizing and strengthening families in crisis through in-home support
- Matching children with adoptive families to give them love, safety and a sense of belonging
- Working alongside complex agencies and systems, sharing best practices to achieve results
- **And so much more! Learn about us at [www.kvc.org](http://www.kvc.org)**