

SIGNS AND EFFECTS OF A POSSIBLE MENTAL DISORDER

DSM-IV-TR

In the United States the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2000) is most widely used to define, classify, and describe mental disorders. In its fourth edition, it is most often referred to as the DSM-IV or DSM-IV-TR. Here a mental disorder is described as a significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or patterns that result in one or more of the effects listed in Figure 7.1. These patterns of behavior should not be culturally related or the expected result of trauma or stress.

Figure 7.1. Effects of a mental disorder

1. Distress, pain, or suffering
2. Impairment or disability
3. Increased risk of pain, suffering, death, or loss of freedom for self or others
4. An important loss of freedom or ability to do things

The DSM-IV-TR, (2000) uses seven criteria to use in labeling a behavior abnormality.

- 1. Distress or disability.** A person experiences personal distress or is unable to function.
- 2. Maladaptiveness.** Behaviors do not contribute to the well being of the person and obstructs or hinders the achievement of personal goals or the goals of others.
- 3. Irrationality.** Behaviors and speech are irrational or incomprehensible to others.
- 4. Unpredictability.** A person's behavior is unpredictable or erratic. It varies from situation to situation or day to day as if there is a loss of control.
- 5. Unconventionality and statistical rarity.** A person displays behaviors that do not fit social standards or that fall outside accepted norms or customs.
- 6. Observer discomfort.** The behaviors displayed causes discomfort to others by making them feel threatened or distressed.
- 7. Violation of moral and ideal standards.** The behaviors displayed fall outside conventional moral values or society norms.

Identify Adolescents with Mental Disorders

There are two things to keep in mind when applying the above criteria to adolescents: First, these seven criteria essentially describe what adolescence is. It's a time of transition and turmoil as students adapt to the significant changes in hormones, brain and physical development, emotions, cognition, behaviors, and interpersonal and social relationships. It is the beginning of sexual maturation, as well as a time of identifying values, personal identity, and future goals. It would be abnormal NOT to be a little abnormal during this time. Thus, you cannot look at adolescence in the same way as adults when you consider these criteria.

Second, identification is often difficult because most adolescents and young adults don't know what normal is. Since their own state of consciousness is all they have ever known or have access to they don't have any sense of comparison. This is why education related to mental health is important for adolescent students as it helps them recognize some of the signs of mental illness.

The Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (2010) lists some of the early warning signs that children and adolescents may exhibit if they have a mental disorder (see Figures 6.2). Again, remember that many children may display these behaviors from time to time. When considering whether or not you should share a concern with parents, you must consider: (a) the frequency of the symptoms, (b) the duration of the symptoms, and (c) the intensity of the symptoms.

Figure 7.2. Early warning signs of mental disorder in children and adolescents

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Individual Behavioral Concerns</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impulsiveness• Destroys property• Rigid behavioral patterns• Resistant to change• Controlling• Anxious, worried, or has excessive fears• Fearful of new situations• Seeks constant reassurance• Indicates a sense of worthlessness, hopelessness, helplessness• Very unhappy, sad, teary, or depressed• Can't seem to control emotions• Doesn't seem to have feelings• Procrastinates• Irresponsible• Forgetful• Overactive or hypoactive (is active less than normal)• Bizarre thoughts• Frequent physical complaints (such as stomach aches, headaches, or sore throats)• Substance abuse• Lethargic or sluggish <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Classroom/Academic Concerns</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessively absent or tardy• School avoidance• Challenges authority or is defiant• Developmentally inappropriate classroom behavior• Has trouble starting work• Unable to complete work or turn in homework• Academic underachievement• Sudden drop in academic achievement• Easily frustrated by simple things or tasks• Difficulty remaining seated• Significant distractibility• Trouble following directions• Short attention span• Disorganized• Frequent trips to the nurse
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- Cannot handle criticism

Social Concerns

- Verbally aggressive
- Physically aggressive
- Lies constantly
- Inability to make friends with other children
- Lack of interest in family, friends, or activities
- Social isolation or withdrawal
- Overly critical of self or others
- Trouble separating from parents
- Developmentally inappropriate sexual behavior

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