Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of Children: An Update

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Mental Health Disorders are Common in Children

- Globally, 10-20% of children suffer from mental health conditions[1]
  - Up to 80% of mental health disorders first occur before the age of 26[2]

- Mental impact serves as a greater challenge for children:[1]
  - Lack the emotional ability to cope
  - Lack the physical development

- Negative outcomes associated with poor mental health among children:[1]
  - Suicide
  - Behavioral problems
  - Emotional distress

- Children who remain free of mental health disorders have better long-term outcomes[3]

1. Jones, E. A. K. et al. (2021). *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*; 18: 2470.
2. Power et al. (2020). *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine.*
3. Caspi, A. et al. (2020). *JAMA Network Open;* 3(4). Doi: 10.1001/jamanteworkopen.2020.3221.

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Negative Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health of Children

- Self-report rates of emotional distress:[1]
    - 16.9-22.8% suffer from depression
    - 24.9% suffer from anxiety
    - 15.2% reported stress

- Increase use of both alcohol and cannabis[2]

- 85.7% of parents feel there have been changes in their children's emotions and behaviors:[3]
    - Trouble concentrating (76.6%)
    - Boredom (52%)

- COVID-19 related worries, online learning difficulties, and increased conflict with parents predicted increases in mental health problems[4]
    - Following stay-at-home orders and feeling socially connected protected against poor mental health

1. Tang, S. 2021). *Journal of Affective Disorders*; 279: 353-360.
2. Jones, E. A. K. et al. (2021). *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*; 18: 2470.
3. Orgiles, M. et al. PSYArXiv. https://psyarxiv.com/5bpfz/. Accessed May 25, 2021.
4. Magson, N. R. (2021). Journal of Youth and Adolescence; 50: 44-57.

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Pre-existing Mental Health Disorders in Children

- Mental health challenges are even greater among children with pre-existing mental health conditions during periods of crisis, with the following contributing factors[1]:
  - Isolation
  - Feelings of uncertainty
  - Lack of daily routines
  - Lack of access to health services provided through schools
  - Lack of advanced emotional development

- A survey conducted in the UK found that 83% of young people with mental health needs believed COVID-19 had an adverse impact on their mental health[2]
  - Specific concerns surrounding loss of social contact and structured activities[2]

- Increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder among youth of various age groups have been documented during the pandemic[3]
  - "The number, severity and duration of these symptoms are influenced by age, history of trauma, psychological status before the event, hours spent watching media coverage of the event, having a family member who died and the presence or absence of social and economic supports."

1. Jones et al. (2021). *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 18:2470; 1-9.
2. Power et al. (2020). *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine.*
3. Rodriguez (2021). *PsychiatryAdvisor.*

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Children Less Likely to Respect Daily Routines during COVID-19

Change in eating habits

- 70% reported issues with eating[1]

- Not eating the same amount of food[2]

- Consuming more junk food, snacks, and sweets[2]

Less time doing physical activity [3]

- 36-47% experienced drops in physical activity

- 41% of parents reported their child had done much more sitting

Change in sleep habits[2]

- 61% reported difficulty falling asleep and/or woke up many times during the night

- 49% reported that they wished to sleep in their parents' bed

1. Jones, E. A. K. et al. (2021). *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*; 18: 2470.
2. Segre, G. et al. (2021). *BMC Pediatrics*; 21: 231.
3. Viner, R. et al. https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.02.10.21251526. Accessed on May 25, 2021

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Schooling has been Challenging during COVID-19

- Schools have long served as a default mental health system[1]
  - 13.2% of adolescents (i.e., 3 million adolescents) received some sort of mental health services from school in the past 12 months

- Nearly 93% of households with school-age children report some form of distance learning during COVID-19[2]

- In one study, almost 30% of children struggled to adjust to home learning[3]
  - More difficult to focus
  - More tiring
  - Less committed to remote schooling

- Worse outcomes for children receiving virtual or combined instruction compared to children receiving in-person instruction[4]
  - Specifically, worse outcomes for 11 of 17 stress and well-being indicators concerning child mental health and physical activity as well as parental emotional distress

1. Golberstein, E. et al. (2020). *JAMA Pediatrics*; doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1456
2. Mcelrath, K. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/08/schooling-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.html. Accessed on May 29, 2021
3. Segre, G. et al. (2021).*BMC Pediatrics*; 21: 231.
4. Verlenden et al. (2021). *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly* Rep; 70: 369-376.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

- COVID-19 restricts social activities[1]
  - 90.2% reported missing friends a lot
  - 72% reported missing their hobbies and extracurricular activities a lot

- 1/3rd of children reported high levels of loneliness during lockdown[2]

- Children who reported higher loneliness had significantly more mental health symptoms during lockdown[3]
  - Loneliness was significantly associated with being:
    - Female
    - Older
    - From a lower income

- Social isolation and loneliness increases the risk of depression, and possibly anxiety during and after forced isolation ends (0.25- 9 years later)[2]

1. Segre, G. et al. (2021). *BMC Pediatrics*; 21: 231.
2. Loades, M. A. et al. (2020). *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*; 59(11): 1218-1239.
3. Cooper, K. et al. (2021). *Journal of Affective Disorders*; 289: 98-104.

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Increase Use of Technology and Social Media during COVID-19

- COVID-19 has increased the amount of screen time[1]

- Children who spent more time texting others reported more mental health symptoms[2]
  - Higher hyperactivity at follow-up

- Anxious children reported to use social media more often to actively seek for a manner to adapt to the current situation[3]
  - To a lesser extent to stay connected with friends and family

- Children who were feeling lonely were more inclined to use social media to cope with lacking social contact[3]

1. Xiang, M. Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases. 2020; 63: 531-532.
2. Cooper, K. et al. (2021). *Journal of Affective Disorders*; 289: 98-104.
3. Cauberghe, V. et al. (2021).*Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*; 24(4): 250-257.

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The Role of Parents in Child Response to COVID-19

- About 75% of parents reported feeling stressed about quarantine situation[1]

- Higher parental emotional distress contributed to lower emotion regulation in children during COVID-19[2]

- Children who had closer relationships with their parents reported significantly less severe mental health symptoms and lower levels of loneliness[2]
  - Lower emotional distress at follow-up

1. Orgiles, M. et al. PSYArXiv. https://psyarxiv.com/5bpfz/. Accessed on May 25, 2021.
2. Cooper, K (2021). Journal of Affective Disorders; 289: 98-104.

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Psychosocial Interventions for Children during COVID-19

RCTs on digital interventions for children:

- Online Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)
  - Short-term therapy option that builds on positive emotion-evoking, resource- and future-oriented principles of behavior modification

- Recess and Exercise Advocate Program (REAP, live-streaming stay-at-home workouts)

- Training for Awareness Resilience and Action (TARA)
  - Neuroscience-based program for adolescent anxiety and depression informed by mindfulness-based therapy, yoga and modern psychotherapeutic techniques

- Online peer support training

Interventions for family distress or parent-child and couple relationship:

- Virtual-Care Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (VC-CBT)

- Unified Protocol for COVID-19 Parenting Stress (UP-COVID)

- Cognitive and behavioral parent-child relationship intervention

- Problem-solving and couple relationship improvement intervention

- Tele-wellness supported digital toolkit

RCT, randomized controlled trial

1. Boldt, K. (2021). *Int J Environ Res Public Health*; 18: 2361.

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Conclusions

Teach and reinforce
- daily prevention actions

Talk
- with children about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and assess its potential impact on their current mental health

Recognize and Address
- fear and stress

Keep
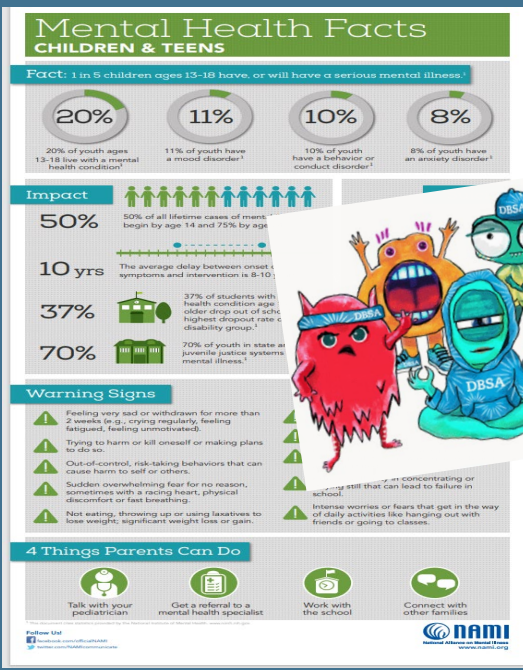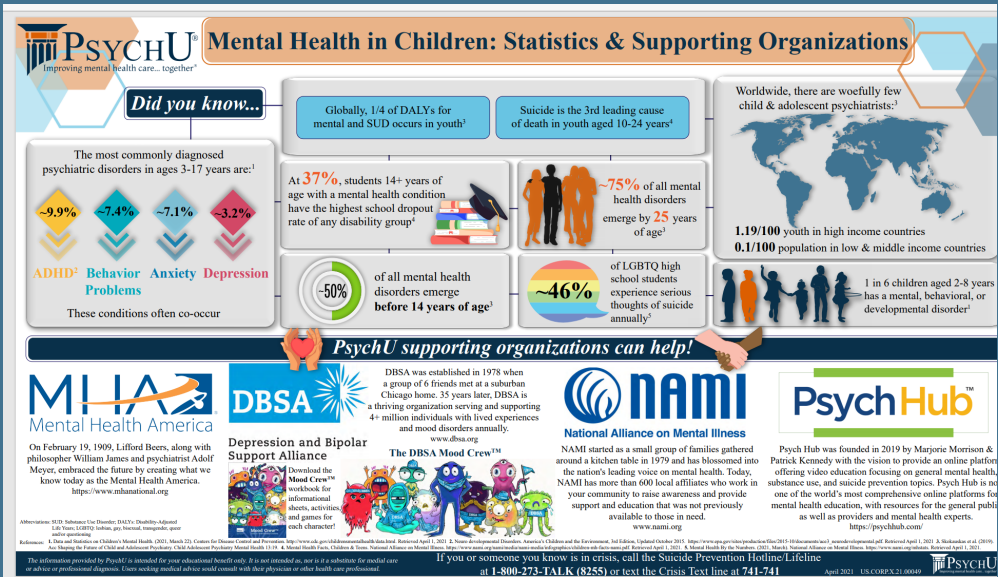- Healthy physical activities as well as structured sleep and eating habits

Help
- children stay socially connected

Encourage
- parents to seek an evaluation for their themselves or children if they have any concerns about their or their children's mental health

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Resources

For Children

BrainPop
- **Coronavirus** https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/
- **Mental Health** https://www.brainpop.com/health/mentalhealth/

National Public Radio (comic)
- https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus

COVIBOOK (short book)
- https://www.mindheart.co/descargables

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (Activities for Kids):
- https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Libraries/covid19/resources_helping_kids_parents_cope.aspx#4

Mental Health America (Youth Mental Health Infographics):
- https://screening.mhanational.org/content/youth-mental-health-facts

For Parents

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- **Caring for Children** https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html
- **Stress & Coping** https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (Talking about COVID)
- https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Libraries/covid-19/resources_helping_kids_parents_cope.aspx#1

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Parent/Caregiver Guide)
- https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

World Health Organization (Mental Health & Psychosocial Considerations)
- https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf

Child Mind Institute (Supporting Families)
- https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/

American Psychological Association
- https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/quarantine-parents-tips

CN COVID-19 Meal Times Nationwide waiver
- https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/covid-19-meal-times-nationwide-waiver

Closing

All of **Your** Resources In One Spot

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✓ Resource Library

✓ Psychiatric Scales Collection

✓ Patient & Caregiver Corner

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