



Central California Pediatrics

MAY 2021

Specialty information for physicians who treat children and expectant mothers.



Making Mental Health a Part of Every Doctor Visit

Merideth Wirstiuk, PsyD

Pediatric Psychology, Valley Children's Healthcare

Children and teenagers experience mental health conditions just like adults do, and these conditions can be difficult to talk about due to the stigma that often surrounds mental health and mental healthcare. By talking about mental health, we can increase awareness of the struggles that many face, as well as the availability of services that can help children and adolescents cope. The most important step is starting the conversation.

Get Comfortable

As providers, we only know as much information as people volunteer and we ask for. For something like mental health where there is often stigma, children may be less likely to volunteer information about the struggles they are facing. It is our role as providers to not be afraid to ask questions and offer support. Asking open-ended questions helps encourage children to share more about their experiences, and when they feel heard and supported, they are more likely to continue to confide in you. Often, things that may come up in a provider visit (e.g., weight loss, sleep difficulties) may be a symptom of a larger issue, and the more you take the time to investigate further, the more likely you will be able to find the root of the problem.

Share the Facts

Sharing facts and statistics about mental health can help children and their families understand that they are not alone in their struggles – one in five children will experience a mental health condition. Validating children's struggles and normalizing what they are going through will

make them more likely to open up and want to seek help and support. Equally important is dispelling any misperceptions that children and families have about mental health or mental healthcare.

Provide Hope

Like other medical conditions, there are treatments available for mental health conditions, and they are effective! Research has shown that early identification and treatment of mental health conditions is particularly helpful in supporting children to go on to lead happy, healthy lives.

Help Families Get Connected

In addition to sharing that there are effective treatments, one of the most important roles we play as providers is linking families to available services. Mental healthcare is often tricky for families to navigate, and many don't know where to begin. Having a referral list of community providers, as well as guiding families in how to go through their insurance to find mental health support, is a crucial piece of making sure families get connected and get the support they need.

You can refer families to our county mental health resource locator, as well as other tools and resources at valleychildrens.org/mentalhealth.

Follow Up

Even after discussing mental health concerns and connecting families with resources, they may continue to face challenges accessing care. As providers, it is our responsibility to ensure that we are following up with children and families to check in regarding ongoing difficulties and help resolve any barriers to care they may face.



About 360me

As healthcare professionals, parents, families and community members, we know our health depends on our physical health as well as our mental well-being. In honor of May as Mental Health Awareness Month, Valley Children's has launched 360me: an initiative to help safeguard children's mental and physical health.

360me reminds us all to take care of our children's physical and mental health. Engage children in conversation about how they're feeling – a proven foundation for a lifetime of mental wellness. Take children to the pediatrician and catch up on well-child visits and vaccinations that might have been missed during COVID-19.

The heart of the 360me campaign can be found at valleychildrens.org/360me and includes resources for how parents can begin the conversation with their kids about mental health, mindfulness and stress reduction activities and more. We invite you to learn more about how Valley Children's advocates for every degree of child wellness and what you can do to help start the conversation.

Upcoming CME Opportunities

Pediatric Clinical Symposium: Top 10 Genetic Referrals – When and When Not To

Presented by Dr. Richard Sidlow
Tuesday, May 26
12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.

Standing at the Edge of Resilience: Gratitude, Gumption, and Grace

Presented by Carole Pertofsky, M. Ed.
Tuesday, June 1
Noon - 1 p.m.

Heart Murmurs

Presented by Dr. Rachel Manalo
Wednesday, June 30
12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.

Register for Valley Children's CME events through our CME Tracker, cmetracker.net/VCH



@valleymeded



@valleychildrensmeded