



About the Author:

Kate Burkhardt

Kate is the marketing manager at St. Joseph Orphanage in Clermont County.
stjosephorphanage.org/

Email:

Kate.Burkhardt@SJOkids.org



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2400 Clermont Center Drive
Suite 200
Batavia, OH 45103
513-732-7424

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Raising Awareness to the Most Common Disease Among Children

This year, Mental Illness Awareness Week takes place from October 6-12. Each year, millions of Americans, both children and adults, face the reality of living with a mental illness. However, mental illness affects everyone, both directly or indirectly, through family, friends, or coworkers. That is why each year, at the beginning of October, we encourage people to publicly support and participate across the country in order to raise awareness of mental illness. Each year, we educate the public on mental illness, fight the stigma, and provide support for those affected.

Mental health conditions are important to discuss year-round, but highlighting them during Mental Illness Awareness Week provides a dedicated time for mental health advocates across the country to come together as one voice. It is also an important time to discuss identifying mental health screening in children and youth.

Mental health disorders are one of the most common diseases in childhood. Of the 74.5 million children in the United States, 17.1 million are estimated to have or have had a mental health disorder, which is more than the number of children combined suffering from childhood cancer, diabetes, and AIDS. Half of all mental illness occurs before the age of 14, and 75% by the age of 24.

Even with these alarming numbers, many children are not getting the help and treatment they need due to the lack of awareness and ongoing stigmas. Children and teens with mental illness left untreated are at a high risk for failure in school, substance abuse, and at risk for entering the juvenile justice system. This is a public health crisis that must be addressed.

It is important to know the signs and seek treatment. Mental illnesses among children are described as serious changes in the way a child typically learns, behaves, or handles their emotions, causing distress and problems getting through the day. The more common mental illnesses that can be diagnosed in childhood are, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, PTSD, and behavior disorders, however, these are not the only mental illnesses that exist in children.

- 1 in 4 children by the age of 18 has a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.
- 1 in 6 children aged 2-8 years has a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.

If you have a concern that your child may have a behavioral, developmental, or mental health concern, consult with their doctor to have your child assessed and to be connected to a local child mental health provider.