

## *Your Child's Mental Health: What's Up Doc?*

When your child has a high fever, you get medical advice. Most likely, your child soon will be back to his or her playful and rambunctious self.

Mental health problems can be more difficult to recognize. One in five children has a diagnosable mental, emotional, or behavior problem that can lead to school failure, family discord, violence, or suicide. Help is available. However, two-thirds of children with mental health problems are not getting the help they need.

Mental health is how we think, feel, and act. It's common for children to feel sad or to behave badly from time to time. If you see troubling behaviors that seem persistent and severe, it's time to take action. These questions can help you:

- **Does your child seem angry most of the time?** Cry a lot? Overreact to things?

- **Does your child avoid friends or family?** Want to be alone all the time? Seem to have lost interest in things usually enjoyed?

- **Does your child destroy property, break the law, or do things that are life threatening?** Often hurt animals or other people? Seem not to care when you explain that this behavior is harmful? Use alcohol or other drugs?

- **Is your child extremely fearful?** Having unexplained fears or worrying more than other young people?

- **Is your child limited by poor concentration?** Suddenly having trouble making decisions? Grades showing a marked decline?

- **Is your child obsessed about how he/she looks?** Experiencing unexplained changes in sleeping or eating habits? Often complaining about headaches, stomachaches, or other physical problems?

- **Does your child feel that life is too hard to handle or talk about suicide?**

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, talk to your family doctor or pediatrician about your child's feel-



ings and behavior. Discuss how your child may have been affected by recent major changes in your family or community. Together, you may decide that your child and family need help from someone with more mental health training.

Parents, teachers, and other care providers can work together to build on your family's strengths. All families have strengths.

Maybe your family strengths are shared during a community function that you attend regularly. A family activity like cooking together may provide a time to experience both good communication and good food. Bonds may be strengthened and skills developed in the ways you encourage your child's interest in activities like baseball, science, or being a helpful neighbor. Building on your family's strengths can provide the support your child and family need to succeed.

The *Caring for Every Child's Mental Health Campaign* is part of The Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program of the Federal Center for Mental Health Services. Parents and caregivers who wish to learn more about mental well-being in children should call 1-800-789-2647 (toll-free) or visit [www.mentalhealth.org/child](http://www.mentalhealth.org/child) to download a free publications catalog (Order No. CA-0000). The Federal Center for Mental Health Services is an agency of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.