



Psychological Considerations in Pediatric Chronic Illness: Impact on Mental Health, Adjustment, and Adherence

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Chronic Illness and Mental Health

- US youth between 6-25 years of age with a chronic medical illness have 51% higher risk of mental illness compared to peers
- Children with comorbid depression and chronic illness have less favorable trajectories of depression over time
- MSUD patients are at higher risk of cognitive, attention, mood, and anxiety disorders
- Over 80% of MSUD patients are estimated to have a form of depression or anxiety by age 35 years
- 50% MSUD patients on dietary therapy and more after liver transplant have ADHD symptoms
- Transplantation can prevent brain injuries and arrest the progression of psychiatric and neurocognitive issues but does not reverse it

Strauss et al. 2020, Muelly et al., 2013



Factors Impacting Mental Health and Adjustment

Symptoms of the illness

Treatment factors

Impact on daily life

Perception of illness and healthcare

Systemic issues in healthcare

Impact on school and social life

Neurocognitive issues

Family factors

Impact on healthcare engagement

- Low motivation
- Avoidance of healthcare needs due to anxiety
- Executive functioning difficulties (attention, memory, planning, multi-tasking)
- Health literacy and ability and readiness to comprehend
- Inadequate readiness to transition to independent healthcare engagement and transition to adult care
- Difficulties with balancing other aspects of life with healthcare needs



Mental Health in youth

- Depression
- Anxiety
- ADHD
- Behavioral difficulties
- Adjustment disorders
- Substance use
- Traumatic stress
- Quality of Life

Coping with chronic illness

- Appropriate education about the illness and treatment
- Adherence to medical recommendations
- Communication with providers
- Focus on positive aspects of health
- Look forward to the future of health improvement
- ACCEPTANCE and commitment to progress

The ABCs of Coping

- **A**ccumulate positive experiences
 - Coping activities can be small as hobbies and daily tasks, or big special events
- **B**uild mastery
 - Find something you are good at and feel confident about
- **C**oping ahead of time
 - Prepare for upcoming stressful situations
- Treat **P**hysical **L** illness, **E**ating well, **A**void mood altering drugs, **S**leep well, **E**xercise

50 Coping Skills for kids

- Ride a Bike OR SKATEBOARD
- ASK FOR HELP
- Blow Bubbles
- Color Paint Draw
- CREATE ART!
- Listen to MUSIC
- PLAY a BOARD GAME
- MAKE & PLAY WITH SLIME
- WEAVE, KNOT OR CROCHET
- Use Kind & Compassionate Self-Talk
- Practice Gratitude
- Make a Scrapbook OR Collage
- PRACTICE YOGA
- Hug or Climb a Tree
- KICK BOUNCE OR THROW a BALL
- JOURNAL OR WRITE A LETTER
- Take Slow, Mindful Breaths
- Cuddle or Play with Your Pet
- Smile & Laugh
- EAT Healthy
- Forgive Let Go Move On
- Drink Water
- Get Plenty of SLEEP
- TAKE A SHOWER OR BATH
- Use Aromatherapy (Send something good)
- Cook or Bake
- Take GOOD CARE of the Earth
- Garden or Do Yardwork
- Go on a Hike, Walk, or Run
- Sing or Dance
- SAY Positive Affirmations
- Look At or Take PHOTOGRAPHS
- Visualize a Peaceful Place
- Try or Learn Something New
- EXPLORE & DISCOVER Nature's Treasures
- DRINK A WARM CUP OF TEA
- USE a STRESS BALL (or other fidgety tool)
- DO a PUZZLE
- Cry
- Clean, Declutter or Organize
- CREATE ORIGAMI
- Get a HUG
- EXERCISE
- Play Outside
- JUMP on a Trampoline
- Rest, Take a Break, OR Nap
- Do Something Kind
- BUILD Something
- TALK to Someone You Trust

Mindfulness

- The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose in the present moment and non-judgmentally
- Being in control of your mind rather than letting your mind control you
- Any activity can be a mindful activity
 - Breathing, walking, eating, listening, sitting
 - Set aside some time, observe the present moment, let judgments and distracts roll by, return to the observation, be kind to yourself and your wandering mind
- Meditation and yoga



Identifying and understanding Depression

- Different diagnoses of “depression”
- Major Depressive Disorder- at least five of-
 - **Depressed or irritable mood and/or loss of interest in activities**, significant changes in appetite, sleep, activity and energy level, worthlessness, issues with concentration, recurrent thoughts of death/dying
 - At least two weeks
 - Significant distress or functional impairment
- Diagnosed with a clinical interview and/or self and parent report measures
- BUT do not have to meet all these criteria for treatment



Identifying and understanding Anxiety

- Some anxiety is normal (and even helpful!)
- But it becomes a disorder when-
 - It interferes with functioning
 - Is disproportionate with what the situation calls for
 - Feels out of control
- Generalized AD, Separation AD, Social AD, Specific Phobia, Panic disorder
- Diagnosed with a clinical interview and/or self and parent report measures
- BUT do not have to meet diagnostic criteria for treatment

Tools for providers

- Screening measures
 - PHQ-9, PHQ-A, GAD-7
 - Pediatric Symptom Checklist-17
- Diagnostic measures
 - CDI-II, BDI-II, MASC-2, Vanderbilt ADHD Diagnostic Rating Scale
 - BASC3, CBCL2- self, parent, teacher reports
- PedsQL Core and Specific Modules

Treating Depression and Anxiety

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
 - Thought challenging and restructuring
 - Behavioral activation
 - Exposure Therapy
 - Coping
 - Connecting our thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy
 - Focus on regulation and toleration of difficult emotions
 - Acceptance and mindfulness
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Interpersonal Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Psychotropic medications
 - SSRIs, SNRIs, Atypical Antidepressants
- **Parental involvement is important in any form of therapy**

Treating Depression and Anxiety

- Early detection and intervention
- Brief, targeted therapy by a psychologist or a mental health specialist in a multidisciplinary clinic
- Outpatient short- or long-term therapy
- Combination of therapy and medication
- Crisis hotlines- 988
- If there are concerns with safety
 - Emergency room visit or 911
- Inpatient psychiatric unit
- Partial hospitalization, day hospitals, intensive outpatient programs
- Residential facilities

How to get help

- Talk to your providers- specialty or primary care
- Ask your health insurance company
- Search your area for providers

- School-based interventions
 - Counseling at school
 - Individualized Education Plan
 - 504 Plan

- Employee Assistance Programs

- State and county services

- 988



Resources

- <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety>
- <https://findtreatment.gov/>
- https://www.psychologytoday.com/us?tr=Hdr_Brand
- <https://dbh.dc.gov/page/where-get-help>
- <https://www.mhamd.org/>
- SAMHSA's National Helpline [1-800-662-HELP \(4357\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/1-800-662-HELP)
- 988

- MSUD Family Support Group

