



## Mental Health Information for Staff, Students and Families

**What is Mental Health?** Growing up can be an exciting time filled with new experiences. It can also be demanding and challenging sometimes. In addition to peer relationships, busy schedules, academics, sports, jobs, and the normal uncertainty related to growing up, our youth are now adjusting to a wide variety of challenges on a community level. This can, understandably, leave school-age children feeling overwhelmed at times, even in the best of circumstances.

**Our mental health** helps to describe our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. Mental health also helps to determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. As we all attempt to do what's best for our students and families, the COVID epidemic and challenges about school make it especially important to know when your young person's responses to stress are normal and when to ask for help. This handout is meant to help you make that determination and to offer guidance about where to find support.

### **Special Note: Emergencies**

*Call 911 when your child is in immediate danger. If you feel that your student is having a mental health crisis or concern, you can request that a Mobile Crisis Team member or crisis counselor assist. It is also important to relay any specific medical, cultural or language need. If 911 or Mobile Crisis determines that it is appropriate, your child will be transported to Emergency Care. Transporting your child to the ER yourself is not recommended. Driving while helping a child in crisis is not safe, but having a second adult with you helps to increase your and your child's safety.*

### **Youth Mental Health: Signs and symptoms that your child may be facing a mental health challenge.**

- Avoidance or withdrawing from others
- Depressed mood, loss of interest, mood swings
- Beliefs that don't seem based in reality
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Dizziness, rapid heartbeat or blushing
- Excessive irritability or anger
- Fatigue, difficulty sleeping or crying spells
- Frequent stomach pain or nausea
- Hearing or seeing things that others do not
- Low self-esteem, frequent self-criticism
- Restlessness or the inability to relax
- Seeming disinterest in appearance
- Significant changes in behavior and friends
- Thoughts of death and suicide
- Thoughts of helplessness or hopelessness
- Unrealistic or excessive anxiety or guilt

### **How to Approach Your Child**

It is not unusual for youth to have a mental health challenge or to be hesitant to ask for help. Young people may be unsure if their symptoms are typical, afraid of getting in trouble, or interested in keeping their thoughts or feelings private. However, when adults share their observations, listen non-judgmentally, and communicate with the young person in a caring and authentic way, school-age children and youth are more likely to feel better and to accept help. Remember, every positive interaction with your child will set the stage for positive and supportive interactions later.

### **How to Get Help**

With support, school-aged children can feel better. Confidential help is available from school, in our community, for families with or without insurance, and from highly skilled school staff and our many mental health partners. We care about our students and their families. If your child is struggling, please feel free to reach out to your child's school principal, school counselor, social worker, or nurse. Help is also available from the HCPS Office of Student Services, at (828) 697-4733.

### **General Information (2-1-1)**

Dial 2-1-1 to connect with a network of over 18,000 resources in North Carolina. 2-1-1 call center experts can assist you with employment assistance, food pantries, homeless shelters, counseling, health care, child care, and senior services. Free, confidential, available all day, everyday and in any language.

### **Emergency and Crisis Numbers**

**All emergencies:** Dial 9-1-1.

**Mental health emergencies:** Dial Mobile Crisis Management at **(888) 573-1006**. Available 24/7/365.

**Suicide crisis and assistance:** Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255** or **Text/Call 9-8-8**. Available 24/7/365.