



CENTERSTONE

2025 Youth Mental Health Report

Kids in Crisis



On an average day in Tennessee in May 2025, more than 200 phone calls were placed to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. In an average Tennessee high school, almost one in every five students has significant anxiety or depression. One in five Tennessee high schoolers have also reported seriously considering an attempt at suicide. High school juniors reported the highest rates of poor mental health, depression and suicidal thoughts [to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#).

This is but one glimpse through the window into a nationwide youth mental health crisis. Our goal is not to cause panic, but to shed light on this growing challenge, help parents know how they can help their kids and understand what support is available for their families.

Data reveals the mental health toll kids face from the tasks of day-to-day living, an ever-increasing volume of social media consumption and from direct and indirect exposure to traumatic events.

The Data

Growing up is a challenge on its own, but when you factor in the pressures from social media, incidents of mass violence and an array of societal issues, the negative toll on youth's mental well-being becomes increasingly evident. Experts are still working to quantify the impacts children experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let's begin with some hope. The majority of U.S. children have showed signs of positive mental health, according to the latest [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) data on the subject](#). Between 2016-2019, parents reported that their child [mostly or always showed](#):

- Affection (97.0%), resilience (87.9%), positivity (98.7%) and curiosity (93.9%) among children ages 3-5 years
- Curiosity (93.0%), persistence (84.2%), and self-control (73.8%) among children ages 6-11 years
- Curiosity (86.5 %), persistence (84.7%), and self-control (79.8%) among children ages 12-17 years

At the same time, many youths face serious, growing challenges. The [CDC's 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) shows that many issues related to the mental health and well-being of our youths worsened over the past decade.

- 42% of all high school students struggle with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness
- Among female students, nearly 6 in 10 reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless and nearly 7 in 10 LGBTQ+ students felt the same
- Across every racial and ethnic group, feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased
- 29% of high school students said they'd experienced poor mental health in the past 30 days
- Over 1 in 5 high school students (22%) seriously considered attempting suicide
- 1 in 10 (10%) made a suicide attempt
- 1 in 40 (3%) had made a suicide attempt requiring medical treatment

According to the CDC, 1 in 6 children ages 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year, but only 20 percent of those kids receive care from a mental health provider. For youth who display warning signs of a mental health illness or need, there is an average of an eight- to 10-year gap from the time they start to show symptoms to when they start to receive care. Early intervention is critical, as 50 percent of all lifelong mental illness begins by age 14, and 75 percent begins by age 24.

Data in Tennessee also shows many of our children are struggling. The [Youth Mental Health Data](#) Brief shows Tennessee rates 50th among states in providing access to care for youth.

- Challenges to care access include affordability, availability, perceptions of parents and communities and transportation.
- An estimated 66% of young people in Tennessee with clinical depression go untreated.
- Only 12% of Tennessee youth with clinical depression receive consistent treatment.
- Tennessee Kidscount data shows 38% of high school students reported a feeling of sadness or hopelessness, and 10% of children and teens suffer with anxiety or depression.

The Stressors

Social Media

In 2022, the U.S. Surgeon General's Office [issued an advisory](#) regarding social media and youth mental health. While there is not yet enough evidence to say that social media use is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents, there are several studies pointing to negative impacts.

Excessive time spent online exacerbates behavioral health issues. The advisory [cites a 2019 study](#) that found children and adolescents who spend over three hours per day on social media are at double the risk of poor mental health, experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. The average teenager, the advisory notes, spends [3.5 hours a day on social media](#).

Studies point to adolescent social media users experiencing body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and low self-esteem. At the same time, social media can offer important opportunities for connection, particularly for marginalized populations, the advisory states. The U.S. Surgeon General [offers sets of tips](#) for parents and caregivers, children and adolescents and other key stakeholders with regards to social media use.

Mass Violence

When a high school student experiences an act of violence in their community, they are at a higher risk of experiencing suicidal thoughts and behaviors. According to a [2023 CDC report](#), one out of five high school students have witnessed community violence in their lives. The report notes “different communities, populations and racial and ethnic groups face disproportionate exposure to community violence related to structural racism and inequities that might have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Societal Issues

According to the [American Psychological Association](#), societal factors leading to mental health challenges among children in the U.S. include poverty, food insecurity, homelessness and lack of access to health care and education.

Lack of Access in Schools

Tennessee ranks among the lowest states in the U.S. (46th) for youth who have experienced a major depressive episode who have not received treatment, [according to Mental Health America](#). A growing number of school districts and behavioral health systems are partnering to meet children where they spend much of their time – in school buildings. [Seventy percent](#) of American kids needing mental health support receive mental health services in a school setting. However, a shortage of mental health providers across the U.S. is causing a strain on support for schools. [About 55% of U.S. public schools offer mental health assessments](#) and even fewer (42%) offer treatment services. Mental health services in schools not only impact mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, but also have a direct impact on overall behavior, attendance, substance use, risky sexual behaviors and suicidal thoughts.

Helping Our Kids

Of the millions of kids who experience mental health concerns each year, only 20 percent are getting the care they need. In the latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the CDC began collecting survey data on three new variables tied to better protecting our children and determining how many are among the most vulnerable. The survey now measures school connectedness, parental monitoring and unstable housing.

School connectedness and parental monitoring are factors that the CDC says help “improve health outcomes or reduce the effects of stressful life events,” while youths with unstable housing are more likely to experience violence, use substances or experience higher rates of poor mental health. According to the CDC:

- 61% of high school students surveyed said they felt close to people at school
- 86% said their parents or guardians most of the time knew who they were with and where they were going
- 3% said they experienced unstable housing in the past month

One of the best things parents can do is know the warning signs that their kids may need help and then intervene as early as possible.

Warning Signs

Here are some signs and symptoms to look for when considering if your child needs mental health support:

- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Changes in mood, including outbursts or extreme irritability
- Persistent sadness
- Losing interest in or withdrawing from activities they normally enjoy
- Starting or increasing substance use
- Hurting oneself or talking about hurting oneself
- Talking about death or suicide
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in academic performance
- Avoiding or missing school

Talking About Mental Health

We know kids don’t always show signs of mental health concerns and can be good at hiding what they are going through or feeling. That’s why it’s important to have conversations about mental health and ask about their mental health.

For example, you could mention reading this report and ask your child, “Have you noticed an increase in feelings of sadness or stress among your friends? Do you ever feel that way, too?” You also can encourage further conversation by sharing your mental health status. For example, “All the news about school violence makes me feel so anxious. How have you been feeling about it?”

Another tip is a daily mental health check-in with your family. This could be done using weather terms. For example, everyone can take turns at dinner describing their mental health by selecting appropriate weather conditions. For happiness, you could say you are feeling sunny. For sadness, you could say you are feeling rainy. For a really bad day, you could say you are experiencing severe thunderstorms.

Having these conversations helps normalize mental health for your kids and clues you into any issues your kids might be experiencing.

Screenings

The U.S. Preventive Service Task Force is made of up health professionals and psychologists who evaluate evidence on various preventive health services. The [task force now recommends](#) regular anxiety screenings for youth ages 8-18 and regular depression screenings for adolescents ages 12-18. This can be done with your primary care physician, school counselor, or mental health professionals.

Getting Help

It’s hard to know when to ask for professional help. Dr. Matt Hardy, Regional Chief Operating Officer for Centerstone, says if you are wondering if you should seek care for your child, the answer is, “Yes.” By the time you are considering a call for help, it is time to seek support.

What Centerstone is doing to help:

School-Based Services

Centerstone provides school-based services more than 900 public schools across the country, including more than 400 Tennessee schools. This allows kids to receive the necessary treatment while knocking down barriers to care — namely transportation. About 70% of kids who receive mental health care receive it in a school setting. This school-based program is vital in providing early intervention and in helping kids have better outcomes in academics and at home. In addition to mental health benefits, Centerstone's partnerships between schools and community partners have proven to:

- Enhance the academic success of individual students
- Significantly improve attendance rates
- Help create a positive school climate
- Improve discipline rates
- Increase graduation rates

Learn more [here](#) or contact your school's school counselor to get started.

Outpatient Therapy and Counseling

Sometimes talking to an expert who can remain objective and provide sound advice and guidance can be a great launching pad toward progress. Information on Centerstone's array of children and family counseling programs can be found [here](#).

Youth Psychiatry

Centerstone's psychiatry team can work with your child to help manage symptoms through medication. The team works closely with your child's other providers to make sure medications are working well and adjusted as needed over time.

Learn more [here](#).

Children and Family Programs include:

- Early Head Start
- Early childhood services
- Parenting classes
- Autism and intellectual disabilities (starting at age 3!)
- Therapeutic foster care and adoption
- Teen health and wellness education
- Therapeutic intervention

Getting Started

To get started, [connect with us on our website](#).

To make an initial appointment with a therapist, counselor or psychiatrists for mental health or addiction services, call us: 1-877-HOPE123 (1-877-467-3123)

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, please call or text the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988 or visit 988lifeline.org to chat with a trained mental health specialist.

About Centerstone

Centerstone is a nonprofit health system specializing in mental health and substance use disorder treatments for people of all ages. Services are available in Florida, Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina, and Tennessee through the operation of outpatient clinics, residential programs, school-based services, telehealth, and an inpatient hospital. Centerstone also offers specialized programs available nationwide for the military community, as well as services for children, including therapeutic foster care. Centerstone's Institute provides guidance through research and technology, leveraging the best evidence-based practices for use across our communities. Centerstone's Foundation secures philanthropic resources to support the work and mission of delivering care that changes people's lives.