



Know the Signs Protective Action Guide

Educates parents, guardians, caregivers of children and young adults on the early warning signs, symptoms and behaviors of at-risk individuals and how to intervene to help them from hurting themselves or others.

Did you know ...

Our society has tried to link mental illness with violence for many years. In our research, we have concluded that the vast majority of people who are violent, do not suffer from mental illness. In fact, it has been reported that between 4-7.5% of acts of violence are committed by someone with a mental illness. However, within those same reports, often there was a presence of other risk factors, such as substance abuse, history of violence, juvenile detention, physical abuse and/or a recent stressor such as divorce, separation or losing a job (1). So, at Sandy Hook Promise, we do not support any broad statement or stigmatization that people with mental illness are violent.

Additionally, there have been statements that a majority people with a mental illness die by suicide. Our research does not support this in any manner. In fact, a majority of people who experience mental illness do not die by suicide. However, it has been reported of those who do die from suicide, more than 90% have a diagnosable mental disorder. Many of these are experiencing undiagnosed, undertreated or untreated depression or other mental illness [Peterson et al.]

Imagine if more people were educated to *Know the Signs* and symptoms of mental illness. How many people could live a healthier life? How many tragedies could be prevented? How many lives would be saved?

What you can do ...

Start TODAY and learn how to *Know the Signs* and symptoms of mental illness. By being informed about early warning signs and developing symptoms you could:

- Intervene and help reduce the severity of an illness
- Possibly delay or prevent a major illness
- Create healthier lives ... and help save a life

Sandy Hook Promise believes greater awareness, education, access and treatment of mental health is needed to help the estimated 60 million Americans experiencing a mental health disorder – including 1 in 10 children. It is only through awareness, education, access and treatment will we begin to create healthier lives and communities.

Below is a guide of early signs and symptoms of mental illness to start protection of children, teens and young adults TODAY. Sandy Hook Promise compiled these through research and discussion with mental health organizations and professionals. **This guide is not intended to take the place of the professional evaluation and/or advice of a mental health care professional.**

Recognizing the early signs and symptoms of mental illness ...

The following is a compiled list of signs and symptoms that could indicate that a mental health condition. One or two of these symptoms should not be concluded as a prediction of mental illness, however, if several are present and you are sensing “a significant change” in your child’s, teen’s or young adult’s thinking, feeling or behavior, seek a medical or mental health professional.

- Unusual or unexpected changes in activity or involvement in interests previously enjoyed – for example - quit a sport or art/music activity or lose interest in going school
- Loss of interest in others; social withdrawal; spending more time alone; stop joining social activities
- Thoughts of suicide especially that include a plan or method
- Changes in physical appearance and/or decline in hygiene

The information contained on the SandyHookPromise.org website is not intended as, and is not, a substitute for professional medical or mental health advice. All decisions about clinical care should be made in consultation with your treating physician. If you need help with a mental health issue, please visit our resource page. Sandy Hook Promise is not responsible for any actions or inaction on your part based on the information that is presented on this website.

Recognizing the early signs and symptoms of mental illness (continued) ...

- Heightened sensitivity to sights, sounds, smells or touch – avoid over-stimulating situations
- Fear or suspiciousness of others or a strong nervous feeling
- In ability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Defiance of authority, truancy, theft and/or vandalism
- Frequent outbursts of anger
- Problems with concentration, memory, or logical thought and speech that are hard to explain
- Homicidal revenge fantasies or threats to harm others
- Fascination with death or gruesome events
- Excessive worry or anxiety (for example, refuse to sleep, go to school, be in social situations)
- Talking/Writing/Drawing/Online activity about death or killing
- Giving away personal possessions
- Experiencing sounds, voices or commands that do not exist
- Dramatic shifts in feelings – so called “mood swings”
- Lack of empathy or remorse for others
- Rage or Aggression toward others
- Difficulty coping with problems and day to day activities

Risk Factors to recognize that, if present, could contribute to violence to self or others ...

- Untreated severe mental illness or not taking prescribed medication
- Substance and/or alcohol use
- History of Violence and/or Aggressive or Destructive behavior
- Sudden loss – death or incarceration of parent/guardian
- Obsession, outbursts and anger with recent loss/break-up of relationship
- Obsession with weapons and violence
- Access to weapons
- Harm towards animals

What to do ...

- Dial 911 for immediate help if you believe emergency help is needed
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline **800.273.8255** if your child is having thoughts of suicide
- Seek professional mental health and medical assistance and support without delay
 - Go to <http://www.mentalhealth.gov/> Treatment Locator to find mental health services in your area
- Create an immediate safety plan which includes the removal of any weapons including all guns, sharp objects, prescription or over-the-counter drugs

Suggested Resources ...

American Psychiatric Association (APA)

[Warning Signs of Mental Illness](#)

Phone 888-357-7924

Child Mind Institute

[Mental Health Tools & Resources](#)

[Parents Guide to Getting Good Care](#)

Phone 212-308-3118

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Phone 800-789-2647

Suggested Resources (Continued) ...

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
Phone 800-950-6264

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)
Phone 202-966-7300

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
Information Resources and Inquiries Branch
Phone 301-443-4513

Sources ...

- © 2014 American Psychological Association. November 10, 2014
- © Copyright 2014 UW School of Social Work, Mental Health Reporting
- © Copyright | Mental Health America | November 10, 2014.
- © 2014 American Psychiatric Association. November 10, 2014.
- © The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. November 10, 2014.
- © U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. November 10, 2014.

Mental Illness and Violence. (2011, January). Harvard Health Publications. Issue of Harvard Mental Health Letter.

“How Often and How Consistently do Symptoms Directly Precede Criminal Behavior Among Offenders With Mental Illness?”; Jillian Peterson, PhD, Normandale Community College; Patrick Kennealy, PhD, University of South Florida; Jennifer Skeem, PhD, University of California-Irvine; Beth Bray, BA, University of North Dakota; and Andrea Zvonkovic, BA, Columbia University; Law and Human Behavior, online April 15, 2014.