

Healthy Body . . . Healthy Mind . . . Healthy Child

HARSH REALITIES REVEALED. As our society transforms from one of closed door family secrets about mental illness to now high profile exposés of those from the worlds of television, film, sports and politics all living and coping with mental disorders, we face the challenge of addressing real issues, real problems and finding real solutions for the youngest of our nation's sufferers.

Recent high profile stories include those about Miss USA Tara Conner's substance abuse issues and the ADHD of ABC's Extreme Home Makeover: Home Edition's Ty Pennington; there has been continuous press about actress Mary-Kate Olsen's eating disorder; model Naomi Campbell and NASCAR driver Tony Stewart have both been in the news for seeking anger management treatment; and there are success stories of those who have dealt with and conquered depression in the past including NFL broadcaster and former star quarterback Terry Bradshaw and Tipper Gore, wife of former Vice President Al Gore. But we need look no further than our own back yard to recognize the problems that can occur when mental illness is not properly treated. In 2006 David Crespi, a Charlotte area Wachovia executive, admitted to killing his twin 5 year old daughters while battling with depression.

Even with all the media coverage, most people still don't know about or don't truly understand mental illness and many of the stigmas remain. Battling myths and reducing stigmas are the first steps to treating the neurological and neurobiological disorders and conditions that are mental illness.

Many times parents, teachers, peers and others don't recognize the signs or symptoms of mental illness so diagnosis and treatment are delayed or deficient. While it may be easy to identify the physical needs of children – food, clothing, shelter, a healthy lifestyle and a healthy environment, a child's mental and emotional needs may not be so obvious (National Mental Health Association). When feelings or conditions persist and interfere with a child's ability to function in their daily life, they may be suffering from a mental disorder.

The Healthy Child Initiative of the Junior League of Charlotte is tackling not only the physical well being of children but, through the Mental Health Awareness Committee, their mental welfare too. Honoring the strengths of families, the strength of our community and in an effort to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, the JLC is *Putting a New Face on Mental Health*. By teaming up with community agencies and partners, the JLC is raising awareness not only of the diseases and conditions of the mind of our children but also their treatment options so that those children will have every opportunity to live mentally health lives and reach their full potential.

REAL ISSUES . . . REAL PROBLEMS . . . Among the children's issues the JLC will focus on are ADHD, Depression, Anxiety and Eating Disorders.

- **ADHD** (Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder) affects as many as 1 in 20 children and it is one of the most common reasons children are referred for mental health services (National Mental Health Association).
- Children with ADHD often have a short attention span, are easily distracted, fail to finish things, and have trouble controlling their behavior in school or social settings (National Mental Health Association).
- 40-60% of kids with ADHD have serious learning difficulties and many of them have trouble developing meaningful relationships (National Mental Health Association).
- If not recognized or left untreated, ADHD can cause problems at home, at school and with relationships and put adolescents at risk for substance abuse disorders.
- Childhood **Depression** is a major health problem. 25-50% of all children and adolescents in psychiatric treatment are seen for depression and its related problems (Dubuque, S.A. "A Parent's Survival Guide to Childhood Depression"; King of Prussia, PA: The Center for Applied Psychology, Inc., 1996).

- And up to a third of the 3.4 million children and teens with depression in the U.S. may actually be experiencing the early onset of **Bipolar Disorder** (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry).
- The dangers of bipolar disorder and other psychiatric disorders are serious with reports indicating many teens with bipolar disorder abuse alcohol and drugs as an escape (National Mental Health Association) and nearly 2/3 of the boys and 3/4 of the girls in juvenile detention centers suffer from a psychiatric disorder (Archives of General Psychiatry, 2002).
- **Anxiety Disorders** (including Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Separation Anxiety Disorder, Social Phobia, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) are the most common type of mental health disorder in children, affecting as many as 10 % of young people (National Mental Health Association).
- With **Eating Disorders**, a surprising 40% of nine year olds have reported dieting and children as young as 4 have expressed the need to diet.
- Perhaps most devastating are the statistics on **Suicide** – 2002 reports found that about every 2 hours a young person kills him or herself (American Association of Suicidology, 2002) and 3 million teenagers had considered suicide or attempted suicide in the previous year (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2002).
- Among the risk factors for suicide is depression. Untreated depression can lead some youth to take their own lives (National Mental Health Association).
- The saddest statistic of all is that only 21% of children in the U.S. who need mental health services receive them (American Journal of Psychiatry, Sept. 2002).

REAL SOLUTIONS.

By providing some of the **basics for a mentally health child** (nurturing confidence, self esteem and a sense of self worth, being a role model, mentor or personal confidante, providing a safe and secure environment, promoting strengths, talents and experiences of achievement, giving appropriate guidance and discipline, communicating and finding help) (National Mental Health Association and National Action Plan for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health, 2000) and avoiding some of the **risk factors for mental illness in children** (absence of love and affection, poor monitoring and supervision, experiences with abuse, discord or violence, poor body image) (National Action Plan for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health, 2000), we can help to raise and nurture mentally healthy children.

The National Mental Health Association has found that early identification, diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems can help children reach their full potential. Mental illnesses and disorders are **real problems** with real signs and real symptoms that require **real solutions** with help from a mental health professional.

- Early diagnosis and treatment are essential
- Let kids know you care and want to help
- Know the warning signs and symptoms
- Seek out professional diagnosis and help
- Use local, regional and national resources including hotlines, clinics and websites with checklists for signs and symptoms
- Comprehensive treatment is often required for mental illnesses which may include individual or family therapy, psychotherapy or behavioral therapy, medications or some combination
- Education and support are key

LOCAL and STATE RESOURCES

Mecklenburg County Area Mental Health Authority. (704) 336-6404, (877) 700-3001 (toll free); for emergencies – (704) 358-2800

Mental Health Association of the Central Carolinas Advocacy, education, support and referral to services. (704) 365-3454 <http://www.mhacentralcarolinas.org>

Mental Health Association in North Carolina, Inc. <http://mha-nc.org>

Council for Children, Inc. Advocates for children at the local and state level. (704) 372-7961
<http://www.councilforchildren.org>

Exceptional Children's Assistance Center Parent training and information, particularly about school issues. (704) 892-1321 <http://ecac-parentcenter.org>

NAMI Charlotte (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) Advocacy, education and support groups for persons and their families living with severe and persistent mental illness. (704) 333-8218
<http://www.nami-charlotte.org>

Arc of Mecklenburg County, Inc. Advocacy, information and support for persons and their families living with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. (704) 332-4535
<http://www.arcmeck.org>

Programs for Accessible Living (P.A.L.) Advocacy, independent living skills, information and referral and peer mentoring for persons with disabilities. (704) 537-0550
<http://www.paladvocates.org>

NATIONAL RESOURCES

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Mental Health Association Checklists, signs, symptoms and treatment options. (800) 969-NMHA (6642) www.nmha.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (800) 789-2647
www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (202) 966-7300 <http://www.aacap.org>

The Center for Children with Special Needs – www.cshcn.org

ADHD News – Support Community for ADHD www.adhdnews.com

Attention Deficit Disorder Association www.add.org

Children and Adults with ADHD www.chadd.org

Screening for eating disorders – www.remudaranch.org

1-800-SUICIDE Connects you to a crisis center in your area 800-784-2433 www.hopeline.com

Covenant House Nine Line 24 hour teen crisis line 800-999-9999

American Association of Suicidology www.suicidology.org