Early Detection Of Psychological Disorders
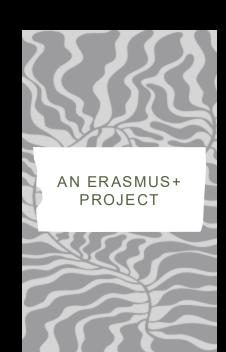
AI@Smile

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

& SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

FOR THE PREVENTION OF

TEENAGERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS.

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AN ERASMUS+ PROJECT

FUNDED WITH

THE SUPPORT

FROM THE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

MENTAL HEALTH

TRAINING

TECHNOLOGY

EDUCATION

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

What is Mental Health?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as:

*"Mental health is a state of **mental well-being** that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It has intrinsic and instrumental value and is integral to our well-being...*

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

What is Mental Health?

At any one time, a diverse set of individual, family, community and structural factors may combine

*to **protect** or **undermine** mental health. Although most people are resilient, people who are exposed*

to adverse circumstances – including poverty, violence, disability and inequality – are at higher risk

of developing a mental health condition."

Mental health is not just the absence of discomfort, but a <u>sense of mental well-being</u>

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

Why is it so important to talk about mental health in adolescence?

Adolescence is an exciting time full of physical, psychological and social **changes**. These changes open the door to new ways of understanding the world and can sometimes lead to feelings of uncertainty or confusion. But it is also a unique opportunity! It is the perfect time to develop skills that will help you face life's challenges and fully enjoy each day. One of the most powerful tools you can cultivate is **emotional intelligence** - the ability to recognise, understand and manage your emotions, as well as empathise with others. By strengthening this skill, you will be better prepared to face adversity and take advantage of all the positive things this stage has to offer.

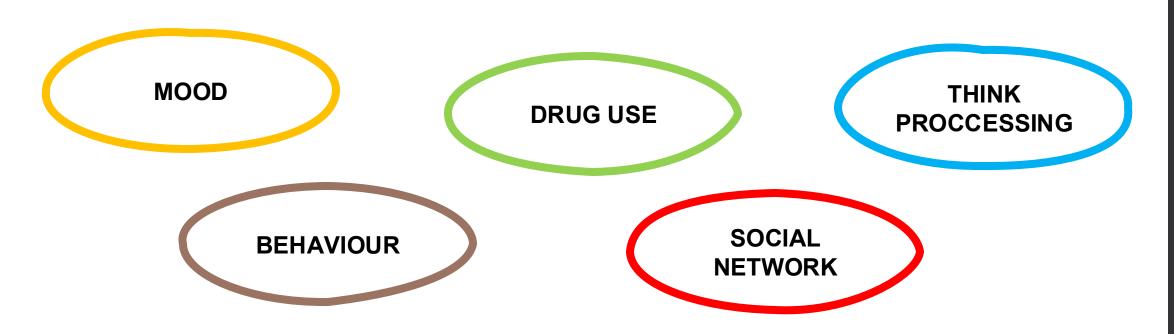# Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

How do we identify our own or others' mental distress?

During adolescence, it is normal to experience changes due to this stage of transformation and the environment in which we live. However, there are certain changes in behaviour that could be signs that we, or someone close to us, are not going through the best of times. Identifying these signs early is key to seeking support and improvement. Pay attention to these important areas.

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

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Main areas to watch for:

- MOOD
- DRUG USE
- THINK PROCCESSING
- BEHAVIOUR
- SOCIAL NETWORK

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Mood

Changes in mood are natural in adolescence, due to the new contexts and hormonal adjustments of this stage. However, when these changes are very intense or prolonged, they may signal a maladaptive problem that deserves attention.

Not all emotional ups and downs are worrisome, but if a negative mood persists or interferes

with well-being, it is important to reflect on its cause and act.

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Mood

A consistently sad mood or a lack of positive response to events that usually bring joy may indicate an underlying problem. Identifying these signs early and working on emotional management not only helps to overcome difficulties but also strengthens an adolescent's emotional well-being and resilience.

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Behaviour

Changes in behaviour are characteristic of adolescence, as this stage involves adapting to new contexts and challenges. However, it is important to assess whether these changes are abrupt, maladaptive or whether the adolescent has difficulties in finding appropriate alternatives to cope with them.

It should be considered that many changes in routine may be due to the search for new experiences, friendships or even fear of unfamiliar scenarios. It is therefore essential to investigate the context in which these changes occur to understand their origin and meaning.

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Behaviour

It is essential to remember that these behaviours do not come out of the blue; they are often the

manifestation of an underlying problem. The focus should not only be on the behaviour itself,

but also on understanding and addressing the root causes. Detecting and working on these roots

will enable the adolescent to develop healthier and more constructive responses to the

challenges he or she faces.

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Thinking and information processing

Our mental health is deeply intertwined with the way we perceive and interpret the world around us. Even when exposed to the same circumstances, individuals process information differently, shaping their emotions, reactions, and overall psychological well-being. These cognitive interpretations influence our ability to cope with challenges, make decisions, and maintain emotional balance. In many cases, distorted thinking patterns can negatively impact our mental health, reinforcing stress, anxiety, and maladaptive behaviors. Developing awareness of these cognitive distortions is essential for fostering more balanced and adaptive thought processes.

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

Thinking and information processing

Some of the most common distorted thoughts are:

- **Overgeneralisation**: using an isolated case (or few cases) to generalise a valid conclusion for all aspects of something.

- **Polarised view**: seeing things in extreme terms, leading to impulsive and unwise decisions.

- **Personalisation**: taking responsibility for something beyond one's control.

- **Catastrophic thinking**: the tendency to overthink, of all possible scenarios, the worst one, even unrealistically.

- **Filtering**: when there is a tendency to focus on the negative aspects of a situation and ignore the positive ones.

- **Thought-reading**: believing that one knows the motivations and attitudes of others with little evidence of this.

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Social relationships

Social relationships in adolescence are a key indicator of mental well-being, reflecting emotional stability, self-esteem, and psychological health. A sudden withdrawal from family, close friends, or social activities without a clear reason may signal emotional distress, disconnection, or internal struggles that require attention. Such changes can indicate feelings of loneliness, anxiety, or even early signs of depression.

Bullying, whether experienced as a victim or enacted as an aggressor, has a profound impact on self-esteem and emotional health. Victims may suffer from anxiety, low self-worth, and social withdrawal, while aggressors may also exhibit underlying emotional issues that require intervention. Both roles in bullying dynamics highlight emotional difficulties that should not be overlooked.

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Social relationships

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok further shape adolescent social

interactions. While they can facilitate connection, excessive use or a strong reliance on online validation

can contribute to anxiety, unhealthy comparisons, and emotional dependence. Constant exposure to

curated online personas may distort self-perception and intensify insecurities.

Additionally, a heightened need for peer acceptance can lead adolescents to engage in risky behaviors or

compromise their personal values to fit in. This pressure to conform can increase emotional distress and

negatively impact decision-making. Recognizing these shifts in behavior, understanding their root

causes, and providing appropriate support are crucial in fostering emotional resilience and mental well-

being.

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

Substance use

Substance use can be both a cause and a consequence of certain mental problems. Adolescence brings with it a reinterpretation of the 'social self'.

Problems of self-esteem and social pressure can lead adolescents to seek new intense experiences and expose themselves to dangers, trying to appear mature by taking risks and copying a very stereotypical adult lifestyle.

That is why it is important to show them alternative leisure activities that are also exciting for them and allow them to develop in a healthy way.

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

Substance use

Drugs can affect health from the earliest stages of drug use, without the need for prolonged or intensive use. This impact is particularly significant during adolescence, when the brain is going through a crucial phase of development and maturation.

Both legal drugs (alcohol and tobacco) and illegal drugs (marijuana, cocaine or ecstasy) are present in youth recreational settings. All of these substances can have significant effects on physical and mental health, affecting areas such as learning, memory and emotional control.

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Other behaviours

The most explicit manifestation that something is wrong in an adolescent's mind is the direct expression of feelings of discomfort, such as negative comments about their own existence (e.g. 'I wish I had never been born' or 'There is no solution for me').

However, there are also more subtle signs that may indicate emotional problems. These range from mild neglect of personal image and hygiene to more alarming behaviours, such as seeking to self-harm.

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

Other behaviours

Self-harm often manifests itself in a variety of ways, including hitting hard surfaces (such as a wall) with the fist or head, or using solid objects. It is also common for some adolescents to resort to cutting accessible areas with the dominant hand. In some cases, circular marks, indicative of having extinguished a cigarette, may appear on the skin.

Other self-harming behaviours, although less serious, are still of concern, such as compulsive scratching to the point of damaging the skin or the loss of strands of hair due to repeated pulling. These signs, although varying in intensity, require appropriate attention and support.

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

Myths around mental health

There are several **myths** and **misconceptions** about mental health that are important to address to better understand this reality.

To begin with, there is a widespread belief that people with _mental illness are violent or dangerous_, when evidence shows that they are no more prone to violence than the general population. In fact, they are often more vulnerable and more susceptible to harm from others.

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Myths around mental health

Another common misunderstanding is the idea that _people with mental health problems cannot adapt to society_. The reality is that they can coexist and integrate well into the community, making valuable contributions according to their specific needs and abilities. It is essential to understand that many mental health problems are not permanent and can evolve favourably.

There is also a mistaken belief that _mental disorders cannot be cured_. This idea stems from a simplistic view that labels people as 'crazy', without understanding the complexity of mental health. Most mental problems are modifiable or adaptive, as they are influenced by context and can therefore improve or even disappear with appropriate treatment.

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Myths around mental health

It is common to think '*it can't happen to me*', but the reality is that anyone can develop mental health problems due to biological or contextual factors beyond our control. Statistics indicate that one in four people will experience some form of mental disorder in their lifetime, although fortunately there are ways to prevent and reduce risk factors.

When it comes to suicide, it is important to disprove the idea that '*those who say they are going to commit suicide do not commit suicide*' or vice versa. Most people who attempt suicide communicate their intentions in advance to their social environment. Although these manifestations may sometimes have an instrumental component, this does not mean that the person is not experiencing profound psychological distress that requires attention and support.

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

Myths around mental health

Finally, when it comes to suicide, there is a myth that it is _completely unpredictable and uncontrollable_. While it is true that suicide has multiple causes and not all variables can be controlled, those close to the person can offer valuable emotional support, if only by listening and/or facilitating contact with professionals. Related to this, there is a taboo against talking about suicide, but this silence only makes it more difficult to understand the problem and the person's suffering, aggravating the stress and limiting the alternatives to alleviate their discomfort.

Recognizing Early Signs of Mental Health Deterioration

Let's see an example

At 16, Adrián's parents began noticing changes in his behavior. Once an enthusiastic and social boy, he started **withdrawing from family and friends**. He spent **more time alone** in his room, **avoided conversations**, and **lost interest in activities he once loved**, like playing football or video games. His mood also shifted—he became **highly self-critical**, often saying things like *"I'm useless"* or *"Nobody cares about me."* Small setbacks felt overwhelming, and he **interpreted** neutral situations as personal failures. His **sleep and eating habits** became irregular, and he stopped making plans with friends.

Recognizing Early Signs of
Mental Health Deterioration

Let's see an example

The real alarm came when his mother found a note with phrases like *"Nothing will ever get better"* and *"I wish I could disappear."* Realizing this was more than just sadness, his parents approached him gently, encouraging him to talk and seek professional help.

Now is your turn! How many symptons can you count? Which kind of distorted thoughts can you identify? Who can identify this symptons other than the family?

Glossary (Max 2 slides)

Two-Three columns style like the following

Term

Explanation

Term

Explanation

Term

Explanation

Term

Explanation

Bibliography

Here we add all the additional resources, articles, videos etc.

The format must follow **Harvard Referencing System** as follows:

1. General Rules

   In-text citations: These appear within the text of your document.

   Reference list: This appears at the end of your document and provides full details of all sources cited in-text.

2. In-text Citations

In-text citations include the author's surname and the year of publication. Page numbers should be included for direct quotes.

Examples:

Paraphrasing: (Author, Year)

• The results were conclusive (Smith, 2020).

Direct quote: (Author, Year, p. Page number)

• "The results were conclusive" (Smith, 2020, p. 15

Articles:

•   Example: Jones, A. (2019) 'Economic theories in modern economics', Journal of Economic Studies, 15(2), pp. 123-134.

Websites:

•   Example: Brown, L. (2018) Understanding Climate Change. Available at: www.climatechangeinfo.com (Accessed: 15 July 2023).

Further reading

Here we add all the additional resources, articles, videos etc. for the learner

1. Title – Small description – Approx time – Link (if applicable)
2. Title – Small description – Approx time – Link (if applicable)
3. Title – Small description – Approx time – Link (if applicable)
4. Title – Small description – Approx time – Link (if applicable)

Thank you!
(partner –responsible
for this module- logo)

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