

# Mental Health Across the Lifespan

## Early Childhood (0-5 years old)

### Healthy Functioning

- A child seeks comfort from caregivers, showing trust that they are a safe and reliable source of support.
- Curious, playful, and able to explore.
- Shows a range of emotions and can be soothed.

### Common Mental Health Concerns

- Extreme difficulty separating from caregivers.
- Very limited eye contact, response, or play.
- Frequent, intense meltdowns beyond typical toddler behavior.
- Loss of previously gained skills.

## Childhood (5-12 years old)

### Healthy Functioning

- Learning emotional regulation.
- Developing peer relationships.
- Ability to concentrate and follow routines.
- Developing judgement and differentiation between right and wrong.

### Common Mental Health Concerns

- Inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity.
- Excessive worry, anxiety when separated from the caregiver, and specific fears.
- OCD (intrusive thoughts and repetitive or compulsive soothing behaviors).
- Irritability, low mood, sleep concerns, appetite concerns, and social withdrawal.
- Physical complaints: headache or stomachache with no other explanation.
- Learning disorders (often misinterpreted as “bad behavior”).

## Adolescence (13-17 years old)

### Healthy Functioning

- Increased autonomy and growing relationships.
- Can engage with moral reasoning and abstract thought.
- Flourishing in peer connections.

### Common Mental Health Concerns

- Irritability, sadness, emptiness, hopelessness, low motivation.
- Extreme fear or discomfort in social situations.
- Eating disorders (low body weight, food restriction, food purging behaviors, binge eating).
- Self-harm behaviors and suicidal ideation.
- Substance abuse.

## Young Adult (18-29 years old)

### Healthy Functioning

- Increasing emotional independence.
- Capacity for intimacy and commitment.
- Exploring vocation, career, and purpose.

### Common Mental Health Concerns

- Low mood, sadness, decreased interest, and substance abuse.
- Excessive worry about many areas of life.
- Panic attacks (sudden surge of body-based symptoms).
- Abnormally elevated mood and low mood (mania and depression).
- Hallucinations and bizarre delusional thinking.

## Adult (30-64 years old)

### Healthy Functioning

- Stable identity and roles.
- Capacity to tolerate stress and loss.
- Balanced responsibility and self-care.
- Meaning derived from relations.

### Common Mental Health Concerns

- Low mood, sadness, decreased interest, feelings of emptiness, feelings of hopelessness.
- Persistent low-grade/"functional" depression.
- Trauma-related disorders.
- Excessive worry, restlessness, irritability.
- Substance abuse.
- Grief and loss, life transitions, caregiver burnout.

## Older Adult (65+)

### Healthy Functioning

- Integration of life experiences.
- Acceptance of changing roles.
- Capacity for meaning making and memory sharing.
- Adaptation to physical limitations.

### Common Mental Health Concerns

- Alzheimer's disease and dementia are characterized by memory loss, disorientation, behavioral regression.
- Sudden onset of confusion (usually medically related).
- Anxiety about the state of life or death.
- Grief and loss are associated with the death of loved ones, loss of functioning, and life transitions.

## Minister's Role

### Your role is not to diagnose but to:

- Recognize when the suffering is outside of normal development (notice changes).
- Protect dignity and safety.
- Reduce stigma and normalize seeking help.
- Listen without judgment.
- Encourage timely referral.
- Remain present spiritually.
- Take mentions of suicide seriously.

## Pastoral Response

### Refer immediately to emergency services or the mental health crisis team if the person:

- Expresses suicidal thoughts with a plan and intent.
- Expresses homicidal thoughts or credible threats to others.
- Is experiencing a first episode or unmanaged psychotic symptoms (hallucinations, delusional thinking).
- Is unable to care for basic needs due to mental health concerns.
- Is under the influence to the point of impaired judgment and danger.