Mental Health and Teens: Watch for danger signs

Submitted by Bay Mills Behavioral Health

Adolescence isn't an easy time for parents, either. As children move through the various tumultuous transitions that accompany adolescence — physical, emotional, hormonal, sexual, social, intellectual — the pressures and problems they encounter can all too easily seem overwhelming.

For many teenagers, these and other pressures can lead to one or more of a variety of mental health disorders; all are matters of concern, and some are life-threatening. A few key tips for parents are listed below:

Communication that's constant, open, and honest:

Your children should not only know that they can talk to you about anything, you have to be committed to broaching topics of concern and do so openly. Talk about your own experiences and fears when you were an adolescent. Let them know that they are not alone, nor are their anxieties unique.

Understand that mental health disorders are treatable:

Arm yourself with information about the most common mental health disorders among adolescents; speak with your child's pediatrician, your local health department, your religious leader, and your child's school representatives about what sorts of information are available from them.

Be attentive to your adolescent child's behavior:

Adolescence is, indeed, a time of transition and change, but severe, dramatic, or abrupt changes in behavior can be strong indicators of serious mental health issues.

Among the mental health "red flags" you should be alert for are:

— Excessive sleeping, beyond usual teenage fatigue, which could indicate depression or substance abuse, difficulty in sleeping, insomnia, and other sleep disorders;

—Loss of self-esteem;

— Abandonment or loss of interest in favorite pastimes;

— Unexpected and dramatic decline in academic performance;

— Weight loss and loss of appetite, which could indicate an eating disorder;

— Personality shifts and changes, such as aggressiveness and excessive anger that are sharply out of character and could indicate psychological, drug, or sexual problems.

Some of the key mental health issues to be aware of are:

Depression. While all of us are subject to "the blues," clinical depression is a serious medical condition requiring immediate treatment. Watch for:

— Changes in sleep patterns;

— Unexpected weeping or excessive moodiness;

— Eating habits that result in noticeable weight loss or gain;

— Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness;

— Paranoia and excessive secrecy;

— Self-mutilation, or mention of hurting himself or herself;

— Obsessive body-image concerns;

— Excessive isolation;

—Abandonment of friends and social groups.

Eating Disorders. Body image concerns can become obsessions, resulting in startling weight loss, severely affecting the adolescent's health:

— Anorexia: Avoidance of food and noticeable changes in eating habits should trigger concern;

— Bulimia: Purging (forced vomiting) after eating — be alert for both dramatic weight loss without changes in eating habits (which could, of course, indicate other health issues that require a doctor's attention) and also for immediate trips to the bathroom or other private spot after a meal.

Drug Abuse. In addition to peer pressure, mental health issues can lead adolescents not just to experiment with alcohol and drugs, but also to use substances for "self-medication." And in addition to being aware of the behavioral and physical signs of alcohol and drug abuse — drug and alcohol paraphernalia or evidence, hangovers, slurred speech, etc. — parents should also:

— Be alert for prescription drug misuse and abuse: According to the AAP, prescription drug misuse by adolescents is second only to marijuana and alcohol misuse. The most commonly abused prescription drugs include Vicodin and Xanax;

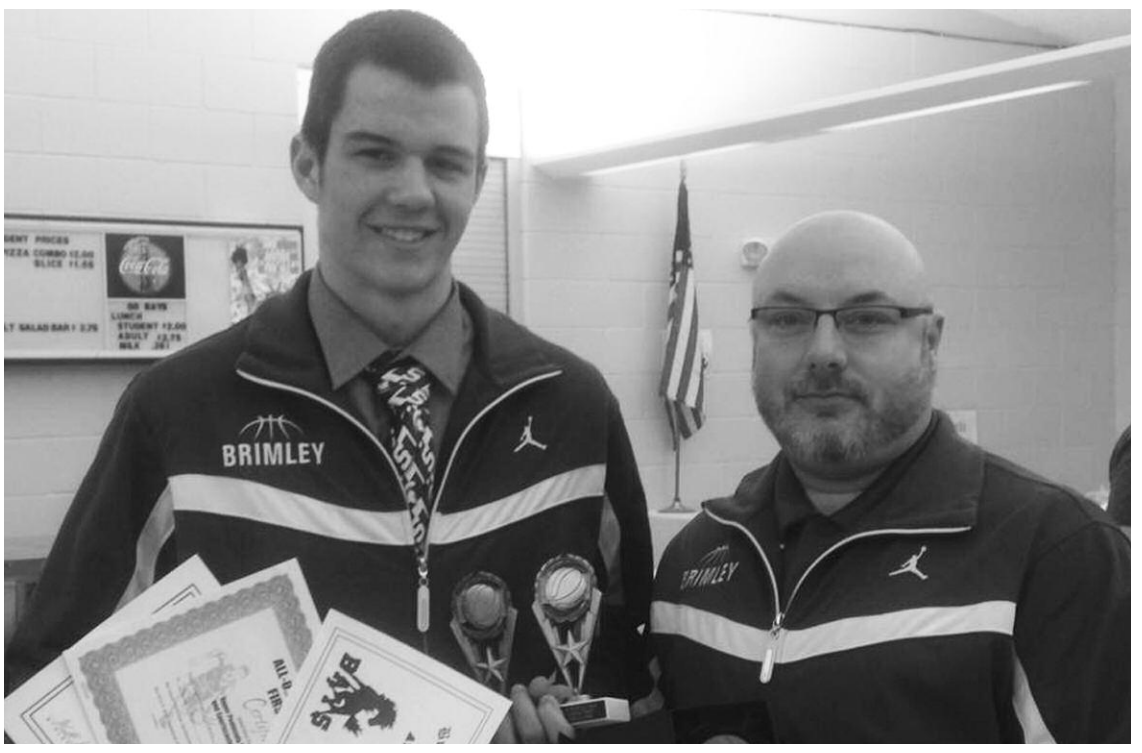
— Know that over-the-counter-medications can be abused as well. Teenagers also frequently abuse OTC cough and cold medications.

Concern about your adolescent's mental health should first be addressed with your child — fostering open communication goes a long way toward fostering sound adolescent mental health habits.

If you have concerns regarding your child, you can contact Bay Mills Behavioral Health at 906-248-3204 to speak with a staff member. A referral from Bay Mills Medical Center is not needed to request behavioral health services.

Behavioral Health has staff members available each day during business hours to field calls or speak with you in person. Your concerns will be heard with confidentiality and options provided. Behavioral Health has a variety of services available. Behavioral Health serves both tribal and non-tribal members ranging from toddlers to elderly. Call 906-248-3204 to request services.

Source Adapted from Healthy Children Magazine, Winter 2007



Brimley Area Schools honored athletes at the Spring Sports Banquet on Tuesday, April 8. The following athletes were honored:

J.V. Boys Basketball
Most Improved Player: Chris Forrest
Dan Schwiderson Award: John Lufkins
Coaches Award: John Lufkins

Varsity Boys Basketball
Junior Most Dedicated Award: Josh Gross and Marcus Harris
Sportmanship Award: R.J. Carrick
Most Improved Player: Hunter Elenbaas
Mr. Defense: Tommy Aikens
Kenneth Payment Award: Shane Beaune
Coaches Award: Tommy Aikens
Dan Schwiderson Award: Shane Beaune
Most Valuable Player: Shane Beaune

J.V. Girls Basketball Awards
Scrub Brush Award: Delanie Walden
Outstanding Defensive Player Award: Kaylee Hill
Dan Schwiderson Award: Cassie Leapley

Varsity Girls Basketball Awards
Raymond Munsell Sportsmanship Award: Emily Chartrand
Coaches Award: Alyssa Graham
Dan Schwiderson Award: Kerri Chartrand
Defensive Player of the Year: Tabitha Graham
Most Valuable Player: Hana Vesela

Pictured above are Shane Beaune (left) and Varsity Boys Basketball Coach Matthew Bathey.

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