

Section 8 - Mental Health Overview

“Of the approximately half-million children and adolescents in foster care in the U.S., experts estimate that 42 to 60 percent of them have emotional and behavioral problems.”

- Rick Nauert, PhD

Mental health underlies many aspects of health and well-being for children within the dependency system. From the exposure to domestic violence and substance abuse to direct trauma caused by child abuse or years of neglect, including the secondary trauma of watching others being abused, the day-to-day functioning of these children is impacted. The extent of the impact is influenced by many variables.

It is imperative children receive careful attention to areas with which they struggle, including the area of mental health. Thoughtful evaluations and individualized treatment can help children heal, grow, and excel. Judicial officers overseeing child safety and well-being who are well-versed in potential child and adult mental health diagnoses are much more likely to ensure the provision of adequate treatment and care.

This section provides six primary resources containing information regarding commonly diagnosed mental health illnesses and potential treatment modalities. The section also includes nine additional resources and links regarding infant and adult mental health, conduct disorder, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, depression, anxiety, and information created by the Pennsylvania State Roundtables' Psychotropic Medication Workgroup.

- I. This resource provides a list of the most common psychiatric medications prescribed for children and youth. Brand and generic names, benefits, side effects, and notes regarding each class of medication are provided. (See, *Hirsch, G.S., n.d.*)
- II. A good overview highlighting mental health challenges facing the child welfare system. A good quick reference of common disorders diagnosed in children (i.e., ADHD, Anxiety, Depression, PDD, among others). (See, *National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, 2003*)
- III. The Pennsylvania State Roundtable Psychotropic Medication Workgroup provides a bench card, educational video, links, handouts, and recommendations for judges and legal professionals. (See, *Office of Children & Families in the Courts: Psychotropic Medications, n.d*)

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- IV. Is there any guidance for judges working with youth who are dependent but also involved in the delinquency system? This resource provides a summary of what is known about the best way to identify and treat mental disorders among youth at key stages of the juvenile justice process. (See, *Skowyra, K.R., & Cocozza, J.J., 2007*)
- V. What are the benefits, drawbacks, and modalities of medication treatment, psychopharmacology? What questions should judges and attorneys consider asking regarding the type of therapy needed by children and youth under court supervision? Information regarding these questions is found in this final primary resource. (See, *Solchany, J., 2012*)

