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# Mental Health Among Colorado's Youth

## The Issue

Social and emotional well-being provides adolescents with a strong foundation to make healthy choices. However, experts estimate that anywhere between 10 and 15 percent of all children and adolescents have symptoms of a mental health disorder severe enough to cause some level of impairment. These conditions can include: depression, substance abuse, stress, anxiety disorders, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder and eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, binge-eating). According to a US Surgeon General's 2001 report, "Children's Mental Health: A National Call to Action," 21 percent of adolescent boys and 13 percent of adolescent girls report that they have "no one" to talk to when they feel stressed, overwhelmed or depressed. (Source: [www.colorado.gov/bestpractices/mentalhealth/index.html](http://www.colorado.gov/bestpractices/mentalhealth/index.html))

## Facts about Youth Mental Health in Colorado

Source: 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

- **36%** of students have felt depressed or sad MOST days of the past year, even if they felt okay sometimes.
- **25%** felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities during the past 12 months
- **14%** seriously considered attempting suicide during the past 12 months — nearly twice as prevalent among females (18%) as among males (9%).
- **11%** made a plan about how they would attempt suicide during the past 12 months
- **7%** actually attempted suicide one or more times during the past 12 months — nearly three times as prevalent among females (10%) as among males (3%).

## Mental Health and Coordinated School Health

Comprehensive health education, school-based health services, counseling and mental health services, healthy school environment, and parental and community involvement all work together to address mental health issues and improve educational outcomes. Such programs have been proven to improve test performance, attendance and school connectedness.

Schools offering these services report:

- Increased school attendance
- Decreased drop-outs and suspensions
- Higher graduation rates

For more information on the link between health and learning, see the Summary of Selected Evidence-Based Research from "Healthy Kids Learn Better" and "Making the Connection: Health and Student Achievement" at [www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/results.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/results.htm).

## What You Can Do

Use state, local and national youth risk behavior data to make a case for:

- creating a school health team in every school building
- coordinating messages, activities, programs and funding for healthy students and safe schools.
- providing opportunities for physical activity and healthy food choices throughout the school day
- enforcing tobacco-free and drug-free school policies

## Resources

For complete Colorado YRBS data, visit [www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/index.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/index.htm). For national YRBS data, visit [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/SS/SS5505.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/SS/SS5505.pdf).