



MONTHLY MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

Presented by the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office Mental Health Task Force



What is an Adjustment Disorder?

An adjustment disorder is a maladaptive emotional or behavioral reaction to a stressful event or change in a person's life. The unhealthy and excessive response to the event or change takes place within three months of the event or change.

Stressful events or changes for your child or adolescent may include a family move, the parents' divorce or separation, the loss of a pet, a chronic illness or the birth of a sibling.

While adults can experience adjustment disorders, it is predominantly diagnosed in children and adolescents.

Symptoms of Adjustment Disorder

There are six subtypes of adjustment disorder. Keep in mind that each sufferer may experience symptoms differently:

1. Adjustment disorder with depressed mood. Symptoms may include: Depressed mood, Tearfulness and Feelings of hopelessness
2. Adjustment disorder with anxiety. Symptoms may include: Nervousness, Worry, Jitteriness, Fear of separation from major attachment figures (parent, sibling, pet)
3. Adjustment disorder with anxiety and depressed mood. A combination of symptoms from both of these conditions are present.
4. Adjustment disorder with disturbance of conduct. Symptoms may include: Violation of the rights of others Violation of society's norms and rules (truancy, destruction of property, reckless driving or fighting)
5. Adjustment disorder with mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct. A combination of symptoms from all of the above subtypes is present (depressed mood, anxiety and conduct).
6. Adjustment disorder unspecified. Reactions to stressful events that do not fit in one of the above subtypes are present. Reactions may include behaviors like social withdrawal or inhibitions to normally expected activities, like school or work.

Living with Adjustment Disorders

Persons with adjustment disorders react to the stressor in ways that are beyond what would be expected. Their reactions to a stressor are usually completely incongruent to the level of stress that one would expect in normal circumstances.

Any of us may have a bad day and react to a stressor in a way we may regret later, but persons with an Adjustment Disorder will present a reaction that will significantly interfere with social, occupational, and/or educational functioning.

The sufferer's age can make a difference in the symptoms experienced how long they last, how strong they are and what effect they have.

Adolescent symptoms of adjustment disorders can be more behavioral, such as acting out. Adults who experience adjustment disorders exhibit more depressive symptoms.

The symptoms of adjustment disorders may resemble other medical problems or psychiatric conditions. Always talk with your adolescent's health care provider for a diagnosis.

Treatment for Adjustment Disorders

Specific treatment for adjustment disorders are chosen by your health care provider based on:

- The patient's age, overall health and medical history
- Extent of the patient's symptoms
- The subtype of the adjustment disorder being presented
- The patient's ability to participate actively in specific therapies
- Expectations for the course of the stressful event (Is the event still on-going?)

Treatment may include:

Individual psychotherapy using cognitive-behavioral approaches. Cognitive-behavioral approaches are used to improve age-appropriate problem-solving skills, communication skills, impulse control, anger management skills and stress management skills.

Family therapy. Family therapy is often focused on making needed changes within the family system, like improving communication skills and family interactions. An additional area of focus is to increase family support among family members.

REFERENCES

The G.C.S.O. Mental Health Task Force encourages you to utilize the sources listed below and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at www.samhsa.gov to learn more about this and other important mental health topics.

Diagnostic Statistical Manual –V, American Psychiatric Association, Washington, DC. June 2013

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/adjustment-disorders/symptoms-causes/syc-20355224>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/21760-adjustment-disorder>

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