

## If you think you may have Action Sign #1...



*Feeling very sad or withdrawn  
For more than 2 weeks*

It is important because it could mean that you have depression.

Depression is serious. Many kids have this problem. The good news is it can be treated!

Kids who have depression may feel very sad. They may lose interest in things they usually like to do. They can have sleeping problems or low energy. Kids may also think a lot about death or dying. They may feel bad about themselves. Some have problems focusing or making decisions.

Your doctor can tell you that kids who have depression are not 1 in 1000 - they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have depression, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family, will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

List Organization Names Here, Including Your Local Organizations:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #2...



*Seriously trying to harm or kill  
yourself,  
or making plans to do so*

It is important because it could mean that  
you are having suicidal thoughts.

Suicidal thoughts often start from feelings of depression. Depression is serious, and is one of kids' most common problems. The good news is that it is treatable!

Sometimes kids have thoughts about suicide when they are depressed (extremely sad). They may have made a suicide attempt in the past. They may also think about suicide if they have other behavior or substance abuse problems. Kids with suicidal thoughts may feel hopeless or do dangerous things without thinking. They may not be involved in school or may stay away from friends or family.

Your doctor can tell you that kids who have depression are not 1 in 1000 - they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have depression, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #3...



*Sudden overwhelming fear  
for no apparent reason,  
sometimes with racing heart  
or fast breathing*

It is important because it could mean that  
you are suffering from panic disorder.

Panic disorder is one type of anxiety problem. It often includes feeling intense fears on many occasions. The fear may strike often and without warning. Kids with panic disorder may feel chest pain, have a racing heart, or shortness of breath. Kids having panic attacks may also feel dizzy, or have stomach pain. They may have fears of dying or "going crazy."

Your doctor can tell you that kids with panic problems are not 1 in 1000 – they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have panic disorder, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #4...



*Involved in many fights, using a weapon,  
or wanting to badly hurt others*

It is important because it could mean that you have conduct disorder or another serious condition.

Kids with conduct disorder may be aggressive and have angry feelings that are hard to stop. It just gets out of control, and they feel badly afterwards!

Kids with conduct disorder may show this problem in different places, such as home, school, or with friends. Conduct disorder is more common among boys than girls, but both boys and girls can have it. The good news is that you can get help for this problem. Getting treatment for conduct problems gives you a good chance to get better and have a bright future!

Your doctor can tell you that kids with conduct problems are not 1 in 1000 – they are 1 in 10! Remember that your emotional health is an important part of overall health. Now that you know it, it's time to take action! By talking further with your doctor or family, you will already be on the road to feeling better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #5...



*Severe out-of-control behavior  
that can hurt yourself or others*

It is important because it could mean that  
you have conduct disorder or another serious but treatable  
condition

Kids with conduct disorder may be aggressive and have angry feelings that are hard to stop. It just gets out of control, and they feel badly afterwards! Kids with conduct disorder may have this problem in different places, such as home, school, or with friends. Conduct disorder is more common among boys than girls, but both boys and girls can have it. The good news is that it's treatable! Getting treatment for conduct problems gives you a good chance to get better and have a bright future!

Your doctor can tell you that kids who have conduct problems are not 1 in 1000 – they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. Now that you know it, it's time to take action! By talking further with your doctor or family, you will already be on the road to feeling better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #6...



*Not eating, throwing up, or  
using laxatives to make yourself  
lose weight*

It is important because it could mean that  
you are suffering from an eating  
disorder.

Teenagers with an eating disorder may eat huge quantities of high calorie food. They may make themselves vomit, or use laxatives to lose weight. These types of eating problems can cause serious problems to your health and damage your body. You may become dehydrated or have a hormonal imbalance. But the good news is that it is treatable!

Your doctor can tell you that kids who have eating disorders are not 1 in 1000 - they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have an eating problem, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #7...



*Intense worries or fears  
that get in the way of  
your daily activities*

It is important because it could mean that  
you are suffering from an anxiety disorder

Anxiety disorders can affect people of all ages, including kids. In fact, anxiety is one of the most common emotional problems that kids have. The good news is that it is treatable!

Most kids can get nervous, worried, or anxious. It can be a problem when it stops them from doing normal activities, like going to school, making friends, or sleeping. Kids can also get anxious in different ways. Fears and worries can keep coming back and may be hard to control. These kids may have trouble concentrating or sleeping. They may also be fearful when around others, or have fears of being away from home.

Your doctor can tell you that kids who have anxiety disorders are not 1 in 1000 - they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have an anxiety disorder, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #8...



*Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still that puts you in physical danger or causes school failure*

It is important because it could mean that you are suffering attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common reasons children see a doctor or counselor. Boys are more likely than girls to have ADHD, but ADHD affects both boys and girls. The good news is that it is treatable!

There are three main types of ADHD. Kids may have severe problems with paying attention. They may be overly active or they may act without thinking. These problems of sitting still, paying attention, and listening can make school difficult.

Your doctor can tell you that kids with ADHD problems are not 1 in 1000 - they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have ADHD, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family, will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #9...



### *Repeated use of drugs or alcohol*

It is important because it could mean that you are suffering from a substance use disorder.

Substance abuse means using drugs or alcohol without a medical need. It can be a serious problem for many kids. Substances may include alcohol, nicotine (tobacco, snuff), marijuana, cocaine, and inhalants. Substance use can lead to problems with school, friends and family. These problems may also lead to trouble with the police. It can also cause fighting, unplanned sex, and driving accidents.

Kids use alcohol and other drugs because they are curious. Sometimes they use substances because it feels good. Some kids may be trying to find a way to relax, feel grown up, or fit in. Kids at risk for alcohol and drug problems may have family members who abuse drugs or alcohol. These kids may also be depressed. They may have low self-esteem. They also may feel like they do not fit in.

Your doctor can tell you many kids have substance use problems. The number of kids who have this problem is not 1 in 1000 – it is 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have a substance use problem, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #10...



### *Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships*

It is important because it could mean that you are suffering from bipolar disorder or another serious problem

Severe mood swings can be a sign of more significant problems such as bipolar disorder. The good news is that these problems are treatable!

Bipolar disorder is a condition where a person switches between extreme highs and lows. Kids may quickly switch moods or are full of energy. They may think very highly of themselves or take unnecessary risks. Kids may also have signs of depression such as crying a lot, withdrawing from friends, and low energy. Not all children with bipolar disorder have all symptoms. If you are struggling with any of these symptoms for more than two weeks, talk with a doctor or parent.

Your doctor can tell you that kids who have severe mood swings are not 1 in 1000 - they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have severe mood swings, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## If you think you may have Action Sign #11...



### *Drastic changes in your behavior or personality*

It is important because it could mean that you are suffering from a serious condition.

Drastic changes in your behavior or personality could mean you have a serious problem. You might be struggling with feeling very sad, or moody. You may quickly switch between feeling extremely high and low. If you have a major change in personality or behavior, it is important to get help. These changes can be treated.

Your doctor can tell you that kids who have personality change problems are not 1 in 1000 - they are 1 in 10! Your feelings are an important part of your health. If you have depression, it is time to take action! Talking with your doctor or family, will help you feel better.

To learn more, talk to an adult. You can talk to a family member, or a doctor. At school, you can talk to a nurse or a counselor. You can even talk with a religious leader like a minister, rabbi, priest, or a cleric. You may also contact one of these groups:

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## **Combined Fact Sheet Containing All Action signs**

### **Action Sign #1 - Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than 2 weeks:**

Depression is a serious condition and one of the most common mental health concerns in kids. The primary characteristics of depression are excessive sadness, loss of interest in activities, sleeping problems (either sleeping too much or not enough), lack of energy, preoccupation with death or dying, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt and difficulty in thinking, concentrating, or making decisions.

### **Action Sign #2 - Seriously trying to harm or kill yourself, or making plans to do so:**

Suicide is the result of many complex factors. Important risk factors for suicide and suicidal behavior include prior suicide attempt, other mental and alcohol or substance abuse disorders, feelings of hopelessness, impulsive and/or aggressive behaviors, easy access to lethal methods, especially guns, or lack of involvement in school and/or work ("drifting").

### **Action Sign #3 - Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart or fast breathing:**

Panic disorder is a common and treatable disorder. Kids with panic disorder have unexpected and repeated periods of intense fear or discomfort, along with other symptoms such as a racing heartbeat or feeling short of breath. These periods are called "panic attacks" and can last minutes or go on for hours. Panic attacks frequently develop without warning. Symptoms of a panic attack include intense fearfulness, racing heartbeat, dizziness or lightheadedness, shortness of breath, a feeling of being smothered, fear of dying, losing control, or losing your mind.

### **Action signs #4 and #5 - Involved in many fights, using a weapon, or wanting to badly hurt others, OR severe out-of-control behavior that can hurt yourself or others:**

Conduct disorder (CD) is a persistent pattern of behavior in children and adolescents in which the youth is physically aggressive to others...he or she just loses control, but often feels bad afterwards. The child or adolescent usually exhibits these behavior patterns in a variety of settings—at home, at school, and in social situations—and they cause impairment. Behaviors characteristic of conduct disorder include aggressive behavior that causes or threatens harm to other people or animals, non-aggressive conduct that causes property loss or damage, stealing, lying, or serious rule violations. In children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), there is an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that seriously interferes with the youth's day to day functioning. Symptoms of ODD may include frequent or extreme rages and temper tantrums, excessive arguing with adults, refusal to listen to adult requests and rules, deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people, blaming others for his or her mistakes, being easily annoyed by others, frequent anger and resentment, mean and hateful talking when upset, or seeking revenge.

### **Action signs #6 – Not eating, throwing up, or using laxatives to make yourself lose weight:**

Bulimia nervosa is a serious eating disorder with a destructive pattern of binge-eating and recurrent inappropriate behavior to control one's weight. Binge eating is defined as the consumption of excessively large amounts of food within a short period of time. The food is often sweet, high in calories, and has a texture that makes it easy to eat quickly. To control one's weight, someone suffering from this condition may use self-induced vomiting, abuse laxatives, starve oneself, or use non-purging behaviors, such as fasting or excessive exercise.

### **Action Sign #7 - Intense worries or fears that get in the way of his/her daily activities:**

Children with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) have recurring fears and worries that they find difficult to control. They worry about almost everything—school, sports, being on time, even natural disasters. They may be restless, irritable, tense, or easily tired, and they may have trouble concentrating or sleeping. Children with GAD are usually eager to please others and may be "perfectionists," dissatisfied with their own less-than-perfect performance.

**Action Sign #8 - Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still that puts him/her in physical danger or causes school failure:**

There are three main types of ADHD. One type is characterized by inattentiveness, one type is characterized by hyperactive or impulsive behavior, and the third type is combined—when children and adolescents show signs of both types. Symptoms may not be noticed until a child enters school. Some inattentive symptoms include difficulty following instructions, difficulty focusing on tasks, losing things at school and at home, lacking attention to detail, or failing to complete homework or tasks. Some hyperactive symptoms include fidgeting excessively, difficulty staying seated, running or climbing inappropriately, talking excessively, blurting out answers or frequently interrupting, or having trouble waiting his or her turn.

**Action Sign #9 - Repeated use of drugs or alcohol:**

Teens use alcohol and other drugs for many reasons, including curiosity, because it feels good, to reduce stress, to feel grown up or to fit in. It is difficult to know which teens will experiment and stop and which will develop serious problems. Teenagers at risk for developing serious alcohol and drug problems include those with a family history of substance abuse, who are depressed or anxious, who have low self-esteem, and who feel like they don't fit in.

**Action Sign #10 - Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships:**

Bipolar disorder begins with either manic or depressive symptoms. Some possible signs and symptoms include mania symptoms of severe changes in mood, usually excessively high self-esteem, increase in energy level, risk-taking behavior, or the other hand, depressive symptoms of frequent crying, withdrawal from friends, or decreased energy level. Not all children with bipolar disorder have all symptoms. Like children with depression, children with bipolar disorder sometimes have a family history of the illness.

**Action Sign #11 – Drastic changes in your behavior or personality:**

A drastic change in personality or behavior could be a sign of a more serious emotional problem. There is a possibility that it could be a sign of a mental health disorder, including but not limited to depression, bipolar disorder, or a personality disorder. For example, people with personality disorders may show signs of impulsivity and instability in mood, self-image, and personal relationships.

For training and/or guidance in the use of this toolkit, contact Lisa Hunter Romanelli, PhD, Executive Director, the REACH Institute, [info@TheReachInstitute.org](mailto:info@TheReachInstitute.org)

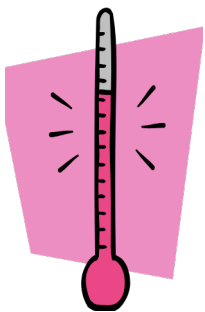
# **ACTION Signs: Your Youngster's Behavioral Health Thermometers**

Wouldn't it be great if a thermometer could tell you if your child was not feeling well emotionally?



Just as a thermometer measures if your child has a temperature, these action signs will tell you if your child has an emotional problem. The signs indicate when your child may be in need of professional evaluation.

If you think that your child may have any of the following action signs, tell your family physician. Take action and help your child feel better!



- Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than 2 weeks
- Seriously trying to harm or kill him/herself, or making plans to do so
- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart or fast breathing
- Involved in many fights, using a weapon, or wanting to badly hurt others
- Severe out-of-control behavior that can hurt him/her or others
- Not eating, throwing up, or using laxatives to make him/herself lose weight
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of his/her daily activities
- Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still that puts him/her in physical danger or causes school failure
- Repeated use of drugs or alcohol
- Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Drastic changes in his/her behavior or personality

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## Sticker Example:

### Action signs for Mental Health

**Instructions:** Use this sticker as a reminder to ask the child about the following behaviors; follow-up on positive responses. Refer to the expanded information sheet.

- ☐ Feeling very sad or withdrawn; 2 weeks or more
- ☐ Seriously trying to harm or kill yourself, or making plans to do so
- ☐ Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with racing heart or fast breathing
- ☐ Involved in many fights, using a weapon, or wanting to badly hurt others
- ☐ Severe out-of-control behavior that can hurt yourself or others
- ☐ Not eating, throwing up, or using laxatives to make yourself lose weight
- ☐ Intense worries or fears that get in the way of your daily activities
- ☐ Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still that puts you in danger or causes school failure
- ☐ Repeated use of drugs and alcohol
- ☐ Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- ☐ Drastic changes in your behavior or personality

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