

Health Matters – *HealthWEST* PHO

Children and young people who may need a little bit of extra help!

Like adults, children and young people can have mental health issues that interfere with the way they think, feel, and act. Most children and young people when they are not coping emotionally would not describe their feelings, thoughts and emotions as mental health issues. Children and young people express their distress in a range of ways from withdrawing from their normal social activities to angry behaviours. They may experience many feelings but not always be able to describe these in words. So it is important for parents and caregivers to recognise when a child or young person needs help, if further advice is required contact your family practice (GPs and nurses). Help for children and young people can range from talking to their parents to seeing a specialist therapist or counsellor. Mental health and wellbeing is important for children and young people to develop and reach their potential.

Mental illness becomes more common as young people move through adolescence, young men tend to have higher rates of conduct disorder and alcohol and substance abuse. Young women tend to have higher rates of anxiety and depression. There is increasing evidence that children and young people who get help early for a number of mental health issues can result in better outcomes for the child and young person. This can potentially prevent problems being carried through into adulthood.

Young people are more inclined to seek help for mental health issues if they:

- Have some knowledge about mental health issues and sources of help
- Feel emotionally competent to express their feelings and
- Have established and trusted relationships with potential help providers
- Young people may also seek help through talking to their family and friends.

For many young people visiting their GP may be their first point of contact for such help. The help can range from talking to the GP or nurse or referral to a specialist services. Help is also available in most Waitakere City High schools. Five high schools (Kelston Girls and Boys, Henderson High, Massey and Waitakere) have a team of health professionals who are there to help young people. The team includes

school guidance counselors, youth workers, nurses and doctors. Most other schools will only have school guidance counsellors and a nurse.

In response to the increasing need children, young people and their families in Waitakere City can access early help through an early intervention project called Your Choice.

Early intervention is the key to achieving positive outcomes for young people, the earlier that support and intervention can be put in place ultimately reduces the chance of a young person developing more serious mental health problems.

HealthWEST PHO in conjunction with Waitakere Youth Health Clinic (WYHC) has developed the **Your Choice Project** which aims to enhance health outcomes for young people (10 to 24 years of age) with mild to moderate mental health issues by providing early interventions. Young people who are experiencing low mood, anxiety, personal or relationship issues, grief and loss issues may be eligible to receive free counselling or group interventions.

To find out more about the **Your Choice Project** please contact Elizabeth Johnson, Your Choice Coordinator at HealthWEST PHO on 09 837 8884 or email elizabethj@healthwest.co.nz