

Are Sedgwick County Children Getting the Mental Health Care they need?

According to the 2001 Surgeon General's Report, one in five children and adolescents suffer from a diagnosable mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment. One in 10 is believed to have a serious emotional disturbance (SED) and nearly two-thirds of all of these children receive little or no treatment.

Untreated mental health problems can disrupt children's functioning at home, school and in the community. Without treatment, children with mental health issues are at an increased risk of school failure, contact with the criminal justice system, dependence on social services, and even suicide. Studies suggest that for every dollar spent on mental health treatment for children and youth, the community receives between \$4 and \$7 in savings.

Individual and family therapy is not always the answer for children suffering from a mental illness, especially for children experiencing a serious emotional disturbance. For children with SED, a "system-of-care" is clearly the preferred model of treatment. (SAMHSA, CMHS) The core values of a System of Care include: child centered, family focused and family driven. The mental health needs of the child and family dictate the types of services provided. This requires a commitment to adapt services to the child and family. It is also a commitment to provide services in an environment and in a manner that enhances personal dignity of children and families, respects their goals and increase opportunities for family involvement. Community-based services are to be provided in the least restrictive manner and in the most normal location (i.e. in the community, at school, and in the home), so the child and family can be supported in achieving their goals.

Proven outcomes for effective community based services show behavioral and emotional problems are reduced. Clinical functioning is improved, school attendance is improved, school performance is improved, law enforcement contacts are reduced, and children with co-occurring substance abuse problems are improved.

Because we care about the futures of our youth, Kansas offers a federal Medicaid waiver program for children 4 to 18 years of age who experience serious emotional/behavioral disturbance. Only state Community Mental Health Centers, such as COMCARE of Sedgwick County, assess for eligibility into this program and provide the community-based services. Eligibility for the program is based on the child's financial resources and certain assessments to determine clinical need for services. **While private insurance does not pay for community-based services, services may be covered by Medicaid or the SED Waiver if the child meets financial and clinical eligibility criteria. Services are also available through our sliding scale fee.**

If you would like to inquire further about COMCARE's Children's Program and community-based services, please call our first appointment line at 660-7540. Your call is completely confidential. COMCARE of Sedgwick County is a licensed Community Mental Health Center.

Jody Patterson, LCP is the director of COMCARE's Children's Services. Jody has been involved with children's mental health programs and services for more than 17 years. She is dedicated to helping children live healthy and productive lives in the community. In addition,

Jody is involved in a number of local and state workgroups focused on improving the quality of life for children experiencing mental health disorders and their families.

Examples of possible SED Functional Impairment:

HOME:

- Frequent violations of household rules
- Dramatic change in personality or behaviors
- Isolative behaviors
- Aggressive behaviors
- Verbally assaultive
- Parents feel that youth is “out of control”
- Parents threatening to place kid out of home
- Suicidal thoughts, plans or gestures
- Self-harming behaviors

SCHOOL:

- School performance clearly below youth’s ability
- Difficulties making or maintaining peer relationships
- Youth’s behavior interferes with ability to learn
- Frequent detentions (ex. more than two per month for several months)
- School avoidance
- Repeated in-school or out-of-school suspensions
- Failing classes not due solely to cognitive limitations
- Truancy
- Assaultive or aggressive behaviors
- Excessive number of sick days without medical basis

COMMUNITY:

- Lack of participation in community or peer-related activities
- Contact with law enforcement due to youth’s behavior
- Running away or threats to run away
- Legal action against youth
- Probation or a history of probation

While these are possible examples of functional impairment, it should in no way be considered complete. As in any determination about an individual, further information and sound clinical judgment will be necessary to make a final decision.