



## Why Children's Mental Health?

Making children's mental health a priority

- **Farah is in trouble almost daily at school** because of her behaviour and angry outbursts. She was recently suspended for trying to stab another child with a pencil. Farah is only 6 years old and in kindergarten.
- **For years, David witnessed the physical and emotional abuse of his mother.** They now live in a shelter, away from the violence, but David remains anxious and withdrawn. He is behind in school and has no friends.
- **Renny, a high school student, bullies other students and has a long history of stealing and vandalism.** He has a strained relationship with his mother, who is concerned about his behaviour and increased absences from school. A year from now he'll drop out of school all together.

**Unfortunately, these fictitious scenarios are not uncommon. One in five children struggles with a mental or behavioural disorder.**

It's a health issue that will affect almost all of us at some time - whether it's our own child, a grandchild, a niece, nephew or neighbour.

Most mental health problems have roots in childhood or adolescence. For example, half of all people who suffer from depression are first affected before the age of 20. In Ontario, more than half a million children and teens have a diagnosable mental illness. Mental health - particularly in children - is not understood, and yet the impact on the family and our community is enormous.

Left untreated, kids with mental health disorders become more vulnerable and less resistant as they approach adulthood. They may turn to drugs, alcohol - become violent or withdrawn - involved in crime or youth violence. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 10-18 year olds.

But the children who receive early treatment respond well because they adapt readily, are able to learn new ways of thinking and behaving, and because their symptoms are not yet entrenched. Unfortunately, only one in six of those with a mental health issue receive the help they need.

"Children in the 6-11 age group are often forgotten", says Dr. Leena Augimeri, Director of the Centre for Children Committing Offences at CDI. "They are ignored, in part, because their threat is not as immediate, and their absolute numbers are smaller. But there are typically seven years of warning before a juvenile becomes a serious violent offender. Those who end up in court for a serious violent offence at fourteen, typically first began having problems at seven."

Investing in children's mental health is an investment not only in the family, but in the entire community. Children with conduct disorders generate substantial additional costs from ages 10 to 27 years - and they are mainly related to education and criminal justice. For example, up to 10% of the cost of crime in Ontario (approximately 300 million) can be attributed to

inadequate mental health care for children and youth. But the average cost of treating children's mental health problems in community-based agencies is less than \$2,500 per child per year.

The research is clear. Early identification and intervention services improve positive outcomes for kids struggling with their mental health. At Child Development Institute, we work to raise awareness and reduce the stigma of children's mental health issues.

Our ground-breaking research in childhood aggression and anti-social behaviour, gender-interventions, family violence and child development helps us provide the highest quality of services and programs. And we multiply the impact of our work by sharing this knowledge; our research, training and evaluation tools are used and replicated throughout Canada and the United States - and as far a field as the UK and Japan.

Our programs have proven results and really do make a difference to the children and families we work with - children who might otherwise fall through the cracks of the mental health system.