

FREE GUIDE

Signs It Might Be Time for an Evaluation

A clear, honest checklist for adults wondering about themselves and parents wondering about their child. Common signs, when to seek help, and what to do next.

6 pages | Printable | Shareable

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If you are wondering whether to get help, that wondering is usually a sign that you should.

How Do You Know When It Is Time?

Almost everyone experiences stress, sadness, worry, or difficulty concentrating at some point. These are normal human experiences. But when these experiences become persistent, intense, or start interfering with your ability to function, they may be pointing to something that deserves professional attention.

This guide will help you identify patterns that suggest a psychiatric evaluation could be helpful. It is not a diagnostic tool. It is a starting point for honest self-reflection.

The checklists below cover five common areas: ADHD, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and OCD. If you recognize yourself or your child in any of these descriptions, it does not mean a diagnosis is certain. It means a conversation with a professional is worthwhile.

Important:

Seeking an evaluation is never a sign of weakness. It is a sign of self-awareness and courage. Getting an evaluation does not mean you will be prescribed medication or given a label you do not want. It means you are getting information to make informed decisions about your well-being.

For Adults: Self-Assessment Checklist

Check the statements that apply to you. Think about the past six months, not just today.

Attention and Focus (Possible ADHD)

- & I frequently lose track of conversations, even when I am trying to listen
- & I start projects with enthusiasm but rarely finish them
- & I am chronically late, no matter how hard I try to be on time
- & I lose my keys, phone, or wallet multiple times a week
- & I feel restless or have trouble sitting through meetings or movies
- & I make impulsive decisions I later regret (spending, saying things, quitting jobs)

Worry and Anxiety

- & I worry excessively about things most people do not worry about
- & My worry feels out of proportion to the actual situation
- & I have physical symptoms: racing heart, tight chest, stomach problems, muscle tension
- & I avoid situations because of anxiety (social events, driving, public speaking)
- & I have trouble falling asleep because my mind will not stop
- & I frequently feel on edge or irritable for no clear reason

Mood and Depression

- & I feel sad, empty, or hopeless most days for two or more weeks
- & I have lost interest in things I used to enjoy
- & My energy is so low that basic tasks feel exhausting
- & I sleep too much or too little (and it has changed from my baseline)
- & I have difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- & I have thoughts that life is not worth living or that others would be better off without me

Mood Swings (Possible Bipolar Disorder)

- & I have periods of extremely high energy followed by crashes into depression
- & During high-energy periods I sleep very little but do not feel tired
- & I sometimes spend money recklessly or make grandiose plans that are unrealistic
- & My mood swings are severe enough that other people have noticed and commented
- & I have a family history of bipolar disorder

Repetitive Thoughts or Behaviors (Possible OCD)

- & I have intrusive, unwanted thoughts that cause significant distress
- & I feel compelled to perform certain rituals or routines to reduce anxiety
- & I spend more than an hour a day on repetitive checking, counting, or other behaviors
- & I know my fears are irrational but I cannot stop the anxiety without help
- & These patterns interfere with my work, relationships, or daily life

Scoring Guidance:

If you checked 3 or more items in any single category, consider scheduling an evaluation. If you checked items across multiple categories, an evaluation is especially valuable because conditions frequently overlap. A professional can help sort out what is primary and what is secondary.

For Parents: Observation Checklist

Children often cannot articulate what they are feeling. Instead, their struggles show up in their behavior. Check the statements that apply to your child over the past several months.

Behavior and Attention

- & Cannot sit still, constantly moving, climbing, or fidgeting
- & Has significant difficulty following multi-step instructions
 - & Seems to daydream or "zone out" frequently
 - & Is constantly losing things (homework, jackets, lunch boxes)
 - & Has frequent meltdowns that seem out of proportion to the situation
 - & Acts impulsively (interrupts, cannot wait in line, grabs things from others)

Emotions and Social Skills

- & Is excessively anxious, clingy, or fearful
 - & Has frequent stomachaches or headaches with no medical cause
 - & Has lost interest in friends, activities, or things they used to enjoy
 - & Has started having sleep problems (nightmares, insomnia, bed-wetting after being dry)
 - & Is more irritable, angry, or oppositional than seems typical for their age
 - & Has expressed feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness

Academic Performance

- & Grades have dropped significantly
 - & Teachers report behavior problems or lack of focus in class
 - & Homework takes far longer than it should for their grade level
 - & Is reading, writing, or doing math well below grade level despite adequate instruction
 - & Refuses to go to school or has frequent absences

What to Do Next

If the checklists above resonate with your experience, here are your next steps:

1. Do not diagnose yourself or your child based on a checklist. These are screening tools to help you decide whether to seek professional input.
2. Call your primary care doctor or a psychiatrist to schedule an evaluation. A psychiatric evaluation is the gold standard because it is thorough and considers the full picture.
3. Write down your observations before the appointment. Use the checklists in this guide as a starting point. Note specific examples, how long symptoms have been present, and how they affect daily life.
4. Be honest during the evaluation. Minimizing symptoms ("It is not that bad") or exaggerating them both lead to less helpful outcomes.
5. If the evaluation leads to a diagnosis, remember: a diagnosis is not a life sentence. It is information that opens the door to effective treatment.

When to Seek Help Urgently

Seek immediate help if you or your child:

- Has thoughts of suicide or self-harm
 - Is engaging in self-injurious behavior (cutting, burning)
 - Has made a suicide plan or attempt
 - Is hearing or seeing things that are not there
 - Is in danger of harming others
 - Has had a sudden, dramatic change in behavior or personality
- Call 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline), go to your nearest emergency room, or call 911.

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This guide is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Always consult with a qualified healthcare provider for diagnosis and treatment.