

Mental Health and Children with Disabilities



RIVER VALLEY RIDERS
THERAPEUTIC RIDING PROGRAM

Across the board 100,000 Minnesota young people ages birth to 21 need supportive services for serious emotional disturbances. According to the CDC, children with disabilities are even more likely than the general population to develop depression and/or anxiety. Studies indicate that 30-40% of children with emotional-behavior disturbances also have depression, 11% of children with brain injuries develop depression, 63% of children with cerebral palsy have anxiety and 10% have depression, and finally, 32% of children with autism spectrum disorders have depression and 39% have anxiety.

Young people with disabilities face many additional challenges. They are more likely to have lower self-esteem, feel isolated, and be victims of bullying. Recognizing signs of depression and anxiety in children with disabilities is important. Caregivers and adults working with kids with disabilities should be aware of signs and symptoms. Within the typical population a child with depression may actually look sad, but it is important also to remember that especially children with autism spectrum disorders show little facial emotion, so this may not be apparent. Typically developing children may also verbally express sadness or hopelessness, which can be a red flag to caregivers, but many children with autism or physical disabilities have little expressive language and cannot tell us how they are feeling. In light of these challenges, it is important to remember that frequently depression and anxiety in children manifests with negative behaviors, inability to concentrate, lethargy or hyperactivity, and emotional instability.