Mental health symptoms in autism may be missed for a variety of reasons:

- **Diagnostic Overshadowing**: Core symptoms of autism might overshadow or mask the presence of mental health challenges.
- **Symptom Overlap**: Autism symptoms appear similar to some mental health conditions, making it difficult to parse out symptoms.
- **Unique symptom presentation**: Autism symptoms can interact with mental health symptoms, resulting in a unique behavioral presentation.

### HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE AFFECTED?

- Around 7 in 10 youth with autism also have at least one co-occurring mental health condition.
- Many mental health symptoms are noticed in childhood, and some as early as preschool.
- Anxiety, depression, and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are the most common diagnoses that can co-occur in youth with autism.

### CHALLENGES IN IDENTIFYING CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS

- Many mental health symptoms are noticed in childhood, and some as early as preschool.
- Anxiety, depression, and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are the most common diagnoses that can co-occur in youth with autism.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The following may indicate concern for a co-occurring mental health condition:

- A significant change in behavior that is different from the individual’s norm (e.g., change in frequency or intensity of behavioral outbursts).
- When previously effective strategies, including those for core autism symptoms, no longer work.
- When symptoms can not be explained by autism or other developmental differences.
- When symptoms interfere with day-to-day functioning.
WHEN TO REFER TO A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

If symptoms are excessive, persistent, interfere with functioning, or when usual strategies no longer work. The sooner youth receives support, the better their outcomes will be.

Publicly Available Mental Health Screeners:

- **Anxiety**: The Screen for Anxiety and Related Disorders or the ADAA free screening tool.
- **Depression**: The Adapted PHQ-9 for Adolescents or the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children.
- **ADHD**: NICHQ Vanderbilt or the ADHD-self Test from Attitude.

WHERE TO REFER

- Mental Health Providers who can modify treatment according to needs and strengths of individuals with autism

  - The provider does not have to be an “autism-expert” as long as the provider is willing to see the child or teen, and can tailor treatment accordingly

  - In an emergency:
    - Call 911
    - Or text HOME to the National Crisis Text Line at 741741
    - If living in Colorado, call the Colorado Crisis Line at 1-844-493-8255

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