

The Sufi Service Committee - Wisconsin (SSC-W)

<https://sufiservice.org/united-states/>

Mission:

The SSC-W is committed to advocating for the mental and behavioral health of all children across the world through education and regional small grants support.

Current State of Children's Mental Health

Children's mental health is a serious issue of public health concern that has been largely ignored. A [national surveillance](#) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) from 1994-2011 on the mental health in children shows that about 13% to 20% of children in the United States experience mental and behavioral health disorders in a given year. This is an important public health issue, which if not addressed appropriately and early on will have more severe consequences later on. The sad reality is that currently, suicide is amongst the most common causes of death in children 12-17 year-old in the United States.

Mental health concerns of young preschool children are exhibited through behaviors such as aggression, defiance, and temper tantrums. Not recognizing these as signs of deeper underlying problems, the school masters reaction has been to use disciplinary procedures, such as expulsion and corporal punishment; unfortunately, an ineffective and counterproductive strategy. A report from US department of education in 2014 indicated that annually 18% of preschoolers are expelled from schools-- three times the rate of their older peers. Children with disabilities, Hispanic and black children are 80% more likely to be expelled due to behavior issues. Many of whom grow up to experience the juvenile justice system the cost of which is estimated to be about \$247 billion annually.

Currently, mental health disorders are amongst the costliest medical conditions to treat in children.

Roots of Mental and Behavioral Health

It is not just adults who suffer from mental and behavioral health concerns. Mental health issues have both genetic and environmental causes. Teenagers with mental health concerns experience them from early childhood. Similar to adults, children experience intense emotions from life events. Adversities and hardships, such as intense poverty, negative parenting problems, traumatic events, child abuse and neglect, etc. usually lead to development of mental health issues in children, which may last throughout life, unless appropriate intervention and support is provided.

Similar to developmental disorders¹, mental health issues, like anxiety, depression, phobias, social emotional issues, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia show signs in early childhood. There are various kinds of symptoms and signs for one to observe. Where some children may withdraw

¹ such as autism, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or ADHD

and isolate themselves, become quiet, display sleeping or eating problems; others may display aggressive verbal and physical behaviors, anger, defiance, and inconsolable temper tantrums. Mental health issues may also exhibit maladaptive thought patterns in children, such as feeling of unworthiness, and being non-deserving of love. When mental health issues are not addressed in children early on, thoughts of suicide and harming oneself may begin to appear in middle childhood or teenage years.

It should be noted that children with disabilities, in addition to their physical or developmental concerns, may also experience mental health and emotional set-backs.

Mental and behavioral health in childhood means that a child achieves developmental and emotional milestones, healthy social development, effective coping skills, and can function well in their home, school, and community on a daily basis. Mental health issues in children and youth is treatable with appropriate support from educators, parents, and mental health professionals. In addition, psychiatric medical intervention is also effective, particularly when paired with emotional support.

Children and their Mental Health

Mental health in children is development of social emotional competence and self-regulation in the context of home, school, and community.

Mental health issues in childhood is more common than was previously thought of. Having mental health issues does not mean that the child has a diagnosable mental illness; rather, that the child needs support in order to have a healthy social emotional development.

In early childhood, mental health issues manifest themselves in the form of challenging behaviors. Children with challenging behaviors usually exhibit two types of behaviors:

- *Externalizing behaviors*: outbursts, tantrums, verbal and physical aggression, defiance, etc.
- *Internalizing behaviors*: withdrawal, isolation, anxiety, mood change, sadness (depression) and crying, complaint of various pains, eating and/or sleeping problems, etc.

Both types of behaviors are serious and often signal a strong likelihood for serious mental health issues later in life, if not addressed early on.

Causes of Mental Health Issues in Children

Mental health issues and challenging behaviors may have different and multiple causes. Often different factors work together in combination with one another. These are:

- Genetic makeup
- Ongoing stress,
- Factors, such as parenting, crisis, adverse events.

- Trauma or traumatic events;
- Child maltreatment (abuse and neglect),
- Parenting issues
- Developmental disorders

Who is at high risk for Mental Health Issues?

- Children who live in poverty are more likely to experience mental health issues due to adverse conditions, dangerous communities, and daily stressors;
- Children with developmental disabilities are more likely to be poor and be the subject of maltreatment, and thus are at risk for additional mental health issues.

Our Schools and Children with Mental Health Issues

Young children with mental health issues, particularly those who exhibit externalizing challenging behaviors (such as aggression, tantrums, and outbursts), have been the target of suspension and expulsion from schools, as early as in preschool. In fact, preschoolers with challenging behaviors are expelled from schools at three times the rate of children in Kindergarten through 12th grade, according to a [seminal research](#) on the rate of preschool expulsions in the United States.

In a report from the [US Department Education](#), African American boys and children with disabilities form the highest number of children who have been and continued to be expelled from preschools due to challenging behaviors.

A challenging behavior usually signals that the child needs social emotional support in order to be able to function successfully in school, in the community, and at home.

Children with both kinds of challenging behaviors (externalizing and internalizing) are at risk for:

- Academic failure, often leading to school drop outs;
- Relationship problems with adults and peers;
- Problems with authorities and authority figures;
- Further physical and mental health issues in adulthood.

SSC-W's Contribution to Improving Children's Mental Health

In the past and in collaboration with other SSC chapters as well as the Javad Nurbakhsh foundation in West Africa, we have provided educational services in the areas of special needs and mental health of children. These services included professional development presentations, training workshops, and consultation for teachers, social workers, health providers, special educators, and other professionals who work with children. These educational services were designed to provide training for professionals in how to work effectively with all children, particularly those with special needs, and those who display signs of behavioral and emotional health issues.

As we continue our efforts along these lines, the Sufi Service Committee - Wisconsin (SSC-W) intends to provide small grants to support individuals who pursue an education to develop careers which would ultimately support the mental health development of children and youth. These small grants are intended to cover either a portion of the tuition or the cost of books for one term and is paid directly to the applicant. They are meant for individuals who lack appropriate funding to support their education.

Grant Cycle

Application deadline: For the moment, there is no hard application deadline. Eligible individuals will be supported based on funds availability; however, grants will be provided in accordance with academic year. Email Sufi@wi.rr.com for information and availability or visit <https://sufiservice.org/ssc-wisconsin-child-mental-health-study-grant/>

Grant Amount

A maximum of \$1000 based on individual need and fund availability.

Grant Eligibility

To be eligible to receive the grant, the following must be in place.

- 1) Attendance at an accredited school. Special considerations will be given to schools in Wisconsin or Illinois.
- 2) Enrollment in one of the eligible fields (early childhood education, special education, counseling, psychology, social work, etc.).
- 3) A 3.0 / 4.0 or better grade point average.
- 4) A statement of financial need and justifications.
- 5) Completion of an essay describing the applicant's goals and aspirations.
- 6) Optional: Any other supporting document such as a recommendation letter from an advisor.
- 7) Completion of the [grant application form](#).

Members or affiliates of Sufi Service Committee of Wisconsin or their family members are ineligible to receive these grants.