



MISSISSIPPI STATE HOSPITAL

P.O. Box 157-A, Whitfield, MS 39193
Phone (601) 351-8018 Fax (601) 351-8364
www.msh.state.ms.us

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Contact: Adam Moore (601) 351-8262, adam.moore@msh.state.ms.us

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK IS MAY 1-7

WHITFIELD—Mississippi State Hospital is joining with thousands of others across the country in recognizing National Children's Mental Health Awareness Week May 1-7 to help raise awareness about the importance of children's mental health.

The week will also bring National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day, set for May 3. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) began the National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day initiative several years ago to help promote positive youth development, resilience and recovery. The day and the week are of special importance to Mississippi State Hospital, whose Oak Circle Center serves children as young as four-years-old and as old as 17 years, 11 months.

“Oak Circle Center is committed to promoting that same development in children and youth who are in need,” Dr. Barbara Fishgrab, Psychology Supervisor for Oak Circle Center, said. “Within the psychology department of Oak Circle Center, our therapists provide group and individual therapy to offer support for and address the needs of children and adolescents who have serious mental health needs.”

Addressing the complex mental health needs of children, youth, and families is fundamental to the future of Mississippi, as nearly 35,000 of Mississippi's children and live with mental health needs that can impact any and all aspects of their lives. These children come from cities, suburbs, wealthy families, poor families, and from every race and culture.

This year's theme for Children's Mental Health Awareness Week is “Building Resilience in Young Children for Dealing with Trauma.” According to SAMHSA, as many as two out of every three children age 16 and younger have been exposed to at least one traumatic event, with consequences that can affect their development, learning, and behavior.

Those experiences can be a sudden incident, such as the death of a loved one, or a continuing situation like an abusive home environment. Traumatic events can even affect children as young as 18-months-old.

For those children who may be unwilling – or unable – to talk about their experiences, caregivers can look for signs and symptoms that the young one may have experienced trauma. They include anger or aggression, declining school performance, separation anxiety and changes in appetite, among others.

With support, children can recover quickly from the issues that may arise after a traumatic experience, even though it may take time to build the resilience they will need to face challenges later on in life.

One of the ways Oak Circle Center helps children is through play therapy. Based on the University of North Texas Center for Play Therapy model, it uses a child's playing, a natural form of expression for children, to help them convey their feelings.

“Children and adolescents with mental health needs can, with adequate support, thrive in their communities and make important contributions to society,” Fishgrab said. “Oak Circle Center staff strives to be a part of that support system.”

MSH, a facility of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, was founded in 1855 and facilitates improvement in the quality of life for Mississippians who are in need of mental health, chemical dependency or nursing home services, by rehabilitating to the least restrictive environment, utilizing a range of psychiatric and medical services, which reflect the accepted standard of care and are in compliance with statutory and regulatory guidelines. The hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission.