

SCOTTSDALE REPUBLIC

FRIDAY, 10.11.19 ■ Z8 SECTION SR ■ SCOTTSDALE.AZCENTRAL.COM

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Fair's craziest new foods; worst to best

The wildest food trends pop up at the State Fair. The Republic's food critic dares to sample seven of them.

DINING, PAGE 3



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Terror charge suspect released from jail

COMMUNITY NEWS, PAGE 8

Zelda's a friendly, affectionate kitty

PET OF THE WEEK, PAGE 14

Phoenix couple's yard yields fruits, veggies

COOL HOME, PAGE 17

You'll find Oysters on a Stick, Charcoal Ice Cream and Flamin' Hot Cheetos Burritos among the midway offerings at the Arizona State Fair. DOMINIC ARMATO/THE REPUBLIC

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Mental illness awareness is more than just 1 week out of the year



Your Turn
Dr. Kristen Ray
Guest columnist

Every year, the first full week of October is designated as Mental Illness Awareness Week. Millions of Americans are affected each year, including 1 in 6 children, so battling mental health stigma and educating the public about mental illnesses needs full-time attention year-round.

We also need a serious effort to increase access to mental health services for people of all ages. The consequences of ignoring access to mental health care are simply too great, especially in children.

Family, community and health care factors are all related to children's mental health. Early diagnosis and appropriate services for children and their families can make a big difference in the lives of children with mental disorders.

Mental disorders among children usually affect how they typically learn, behave or handle their emotions, causing distress and problems getting through the day. Common mental disorders diagnosed in childhood are anxiety, behavior disorders and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). But that's just the beginning.

The statistics about mental illness in children and access to treatment in America are chilling. According to the CDC, in 2016, 1 in 6 U.S. children ages 2–8 had a diagnosed mental, behavioral or developmental disorder. Within this same year, only 6 in 10 children ages 3–17 suffering from anxiety actually received treatment. In addition, 3.2 percent of children ages 3–17 have been diagnosed with depression. The treatment statistics are equally depressing.

So what's driving these mental health issues in children? To a large extent, poverty. Living in poverty impairs children's physical health, emotional and mental health, brain development and school performance. In the long term, these children are less likely to graduate from high school or go to college.

Among children living below 100 percent of the federal poverty level, more

than 1 in 5 have a mental, behavioral or developmental disorder. Age and poverty levels also affect the likelihood of children receiving treatment for anxiety, depression or behavior problems. The poorer the child and family, the less access to mental health services and treatment.

Nationally, an estimated 15 million American children live below the federal poverty line. With around 25 percent of children in Maricopa County living at or below the poverty line, it's no surprise that so many lack access to needed health care services.

For example, studies show 70 percent of Arizona children with major depression do not receive needed mental health treatment. As we see way too frequently, the continued lack of care for mental health disorders can have all too deadly consequences.

Steps for proactive mental health care

Early development is a critical period for child growth and development. Parents must be able to recognize, combat and protect against the effects of mental illness in kids. Without treatment and intervention, problems will likely get worse.

Parents can help by providing proper nutrition and maintaining a proper sleep schedule. Children and adults can work together to learn and implement practices like mindfulness, building strong relationships with peers and family members and mental reframing in order to promote good mental health and combat against mental illnesses and stereotypes.

Yes, maintaining good mental health is an ongoing process. Surrounding children with a supportive social circle, community and access to services is a good start.

Dr. Kristen Ray, DBH, LPC is the vice president of behavioral health at Bayless Integrated Healthcare. Ray works with children and adults individually, in groups, and with their families. Her areas of experience include integrated behavioral health, public health, trauma, abuse, and women's issues. For more information about Ray and Bayless Integrated Healthcare, visit www.baylesshealthcare.com.