Generation Z and mental health



There's a new generation waiting in the wings – Generation Z. Still mostly in their teens and tweens, Gen Zs are the first truly digital generation. They don't remember life without the internet and smartphones and are aware from an early age about what's going on in the world. They were born in an age of terrorism, school shootings, political unrest, corporate corruption, climate change and economic uncertainty. It's not surprising that they're even more scared, anxious and depressed about their future than the Millennials. But they're also doing something about it. They mirror the Baby Boomers as social activists and agents of change and, like the Millennials, they're not afraid to seek help for mental health issues.

A switched on generation

Gen Zs lifelong dependence on technology has made them masters of multitasking, able to text, talk, listen and walk at the same time – an ability than amazes their parents and grandparents – but it's damaging their mental health. They aren't switching off and depend on their devices and the online world for conversation and entertainment instead of in-person, human connections. They're also constantly comparing themselves to people who are famous because of social media without understanding that images are filtered, posts and tweets are carefully crafted and personal "brands" are being created. This together with online, bullying, shaming and trolling make many young people feel they're not smart enough, talented enough, popular enough, athletic enough or good enough. And when the quest for perfectionism and self-criticism increase, so does anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm, social phobia and suicides.

Fortunately, Gen Zs older cousins, the Millennials, revolutionized the way mental illness is viewed, diagnosed and treated. They openly discussed mental health, helped radically reduce stigma and demanded better services. The medical community has also realized that 70 percent of mental health problems – and addictions – manifest in childhood and adolescence and more attention is being paid to the mental wellbeing of kids. Despite this cultural shift, mental health experts continue to forecast a mental health crisis for Gen Z. Social isolation, constant scrutiny, overprotective parents and a constant bombardment of news have made many Gen Zs reluctant to step out into the world and depression and anxiety in children and teens continues to rise-- and suicide rates skyrocket. And the business world, which Gen Zs have little respect for, is on their horizon. It will be imperative for employers to promote their Employee Assistance Programs to this next generation of leaders. Gen Ys need to know that information, resources and support regarding a wide variety of issues are available through online platforms, virtual communities and interactive programs.

Gen Z is coming and we need to be ready.