

**Association for Child and Adolescent Counseling**  
**Position Statement on Parity for Child and Adolescent Mental Health**  
**Adopted by ACAC 3-14-15**

The *Association for Child and Adolescent Counseling* is committed to the principle that *all* children and adolescents (ages birth through adolescence) have equal access to a full array of mental health services, regardless of ability to pay or insurance coverage. These services are entitled to the same reimbursement rates seen with physical health services.

**Whereas,**

- We now know that adverse events in childhood have a long lasting impact on both emotional *and* physical health (Dong et al., 2004).
- One of every five child/adolescent has a diagnosed mental health disorder, and one in ten experience serious emotional disturbances that affect daily functioning; however, four out of five children who need mental health services do not receive them. (Barry & Busch, 2008; Kataoka, Zhang, & Wells, 2002; U.S. Department of Health Human Services, 2000)
- Many serious psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia, often appear during late adolescence. (Kessler et al., 2005).
- Mental health in children and adolescents can be assessed, diagnosed, and treated early to *prevent* future costs to the health care system (Cooper & Masi, 2006).
- Mental health reimbursement rates are frequently not on par with physical health reimbursement rates. This creates a barrier to treatment services for children, adolescents, and their families and broad gaps in available services (Barry & Busch, 2008; Fowler, 2009; Mental Health America, 2015).

**Therefore,**

The *Association for Child and Adolescent Counseling* supports comprehensive mental health parity for all children, ages birth through adolescence. Adequate reimbursement rates should be provided to all mental and behavioral health counselors that serve this vulnerable population.

**Summary**

Mental health disorders in children and adolescents are most effectively managed early in the life of the disorder. Due to mental healthcare disparity, as many as 80% of the children and adolescents in need of services fall through the cracks, costing the larger health care system, the youth, their families, and our society much more in the long run (Kataoka, Zhang, & Wells, 2002). The *Association for Child and Adolescent Counseling* strongly supports comprehensive mental health parity for all children, ages birth through adolescence, and all providers who serve this population.

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Respectfully submitted by the ACAC Advocacy Committee: Evette Horton (Chair), Rebekah Byrd, Louise Glenn, Ashley E. Poklar, Stephanie Rickards, and Jill Van Horne.

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