



NOVA Center, other agencies provide mental health care for Huntsville-area youth



The NOVA Center for Youth & Family brings mental health programs into area schools, providing individual and group therapy to children and families dealing with mental illness. (Sarah Cole/scole@al.com)

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suicide prevention & crisis hotlines, tips

- [Crisis Services of North Alabama - 256-716-1000](tel:256-716-1000)
- [National Suicide Prevention Hotline - 1-800-273-TALK \(8255\)](tel:1-800-273-TALK)
- [Alabama Suicide Prevention & Resources Coalition tips and warning signs](#)

[HUNTSVILLE, Alabama](#) -- Mental health care is often hard to find, particularly if a person doesn't know where to start.

In the months before [15-year-old Christian Adamek took his life](#), his family searched in vain for the right professionals to help the teenager through his severe depression.

There are a number of avenues in the Huntsville area through which to find help, said Ashley Jones, director of the [NOVA Center for Youth & Family](#), a division of the Mental Health Center of Madison County. The NOVA Center provides mental health and substance abuse services for children under the age of 18.

[\[Related story: A cry for help: Christian Adamek's father starts a conversation about mental health that doesn't need to end \(Our view\)\]](#)

"We primarily serve the Medicaid and ALL Kids populations," Jones said. "But we also serve those on private insurance.

"The NOVA Center will take anybody and everybody," Jones said. "If you have insurance, we have a provider for that insurance. If you don't have insurance, we will see you on a sliding scale."

The center also strives to get to children in trouble as early as possible, Jones said. It's School Based Mental Health Program, funded through Huntsville Hospital's Community Health Initiative Foundation, partners with the [HEALS program](#) to provide mental health services in the schools.

Michael Andrews, head of the school-based program, said the program is in 22 schools this year, mostly elementary schools.

"If a child happens to be in one of those schools, it is very convenient for them," Andrews said. The NOVA center has licensed clinicians, a psychologist and a child psychiatrist to assist children with emotional or mental issues. The staff can also do diagnostic testing to better determine what issues a child has.

Jones admits that there are gaps in what assistance the center can give. At that point, she said, NOVA's counselors would refer a patient out to the appropriate provider.

"The trick is matching the appropriate people to the appropriate services," Jones said.

For sexual abuse issues, the referral would be to the [National Children's Advocacy Center](#), she said. For issues related to autism or Asperger's Syndrome, a client would be referred to [the Riley Center](#).

It does take time to get a client aligned with the right help, Jones said. Children or adolescents suffering from suicidal thoughts or ideations should call the [Crisis Services of North Alabama](#) at 2-1-1, 256-716-1000 or 1-800-273-TALK.

A person in dire need of help can also go to the nearest emergency room, where they would be evaluated and, if necessary, hospitalized.

Below is a listing of resources for children and teens with mental illness. Click on the link to visit the agency's website:

[Alabama Psychiatric Services](#): 256-774-4500

[Alabama Psychological Services Center](#): 256-533-9393

[Asbury Child and Family Counseling Center](#): 256-722-8091

[Caring House through Hospice Family Care](#): 256-650-1212

[Cornerstone Counseling Center](#): 256-519-9000

[Crisis Services of North Alabama](#): Call 2-1-1, 256-716-1000 or 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

[Family Services Center](#): 256-551-1610

[Longwood Psychological Associates](#): 256-534-8161

[Mental Health Center of Madison County](#): 256-533-1970

[National Children's Advocacy Center](#): 256-533-KIDS (5437)

[Nova Center for Youth & Family](#): 256-705-6493

[The Riley Center \(working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorders\)](#): 256-882-2457

[Trinity Counseling Center](#): 256-883-3231

[United Cerebral Palsy of Huntsville & Tennessee Valley](#): 256-852-5600

There are also resources for parents, teachers and other adults to better understand mental illness. Rita Limbaugh, director of community education for the county Mental Health Center, explained that [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) is a public education program for anyone who works with or interacts with children ages 12 to 18 on a regular basis.

"This would be an excellent tool for parents, teachers, school counselors and youth leaders, as it teaches signs and symptoms of mental and emotional difficulties in youth and provides an action plan that one might use to assist a youth having such difficulties," Limbaugh said.

Limbaugh herself is a recently trained youth mental health first aid instructor and is available to teach the eight-hour course.

To learn more about the course, contact Limbaugh at 256-705-6379 or at rita.limbaugh@mhcmc.org.