From the Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health, Tampa, Florida...

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October 10, 2003, is World Mental Health Day: Emotional and Behavioral Disorders of Children and Adolescents.

This is the second year in a row in which the mental health needs of children and adolescents has been selected as the theme for World Mental Health Day. Furthermore, this is the third time (out of seven) that the theme of children's mental health has been chosen for this annual event. Although there is much work to be done, the fact that children’s mental health needs are an increasing focus of worldwide concern is encouraging. According to the World Health Organization, up to 20% of children and adolescents worldwide suffer from an impairing mental illness, and suicide is the third leading cause of death among these youth. For more information about World Mental Health Day, sponsored by the World Federation for Mental Health, visit the WMHD website, at: www.wfmh.org/wmhd.html

The following address by Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, was delivered to the U.N. on October 6, on the occasion of World Mental Health Day, October 10, 2003.

“This year’s Mental Health Day focuses on the special needs of some of the world's most vulnerable individuals--children and adolescents with mental, emotional and behavioral disorders. The burdens associated with these disorders are increasingly understood as a threat to the healthy development and well-being of children and adolescents worldwide. These young people--who are already so deeply vulnerable--may be subjected to stigma and discrimination; they may receive inadequate care; they may not have adequate opportunities for education; they may never get the chance to build the future which they, like all young people, deserve. Developing and developed countries alike have a duty to do all they can to ease these burdens, by improving diagnosis, treatment, public awareness and education. Governments must live up to their obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child--the most widely ratified international legal instrument in history--to ensure ‘the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.' On this World Mental Health Day, let us rededicate ourselves to translating into reality the rights of children as enshrined in the Convention. Let us vow to give the mental health of young people all the attention it deserves.”

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