

**GREEK ORTHODOX LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY, INC.
NATIONAL COMMITTEE REPORT
2026 NATIONAL PHILOPTOCHOS CONVENTION
CLEVELAND, OHIO, JUNE 29 – JULY 2, 2026**



Educational Initiatives Committee – Children’s Mental Health

Chair: Despina Denne

Co-Chair: Martha Driscoll

Committee Members: Demetria Bakris (Chicago)

Irene Hotzoglou (AD)

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Children’s mental health remains a critical and urgent public health concern in the United States. Prevalence rates have increased over the past decade and access to care is still inadequate for many. Statistics show that at least half of major mental illnesses start before age 18, with some disorders being more common in children and adolescents. One in five children aged 3 to 17 have a diagnosed mental, emotional, behavioral, or developmental disorder and include conditions such as anxiety, depression and ADHD.

In response to this growing crisis, the Educational Initiatives Committee directed its efforts this term on children’s mental health, with the objective of providing awareness and guidance to our parish families. During its first meeting in March 2025, the committee members participated in an enthusiastic discussion on how best to approach this topic and subsequently agreed to research the following pertinent questions:

1. *What are the most common mental health concerns in children?*
2. *What do the numbers tell us about children’s mental health?*
3. *Why are youth mental health disorders on the rise?*
4. *Why should we care?*
5. *What should we watch for?*
6. *What can we do if we suspect that a child struggles with mental health issues?*
7. *How do societal factors---including social media---impact the mental health of children and adolescents?*
8. *What is the mental health impact on vulnerable individuals, including children with chronic illness?*

Each committee member volunteered to research one of these questions, and over the course of multiple Zoom sessions throughout 2025 and early in 2026, provided answers which formed the basis of a **Children’s Mental Health Guidance Document**. To assist us in our work, the committee invited individuals with relevant experience and information to join our Zoom sessions. In June 2025, Father Nikolas Delaveris, Presbyter of Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church in

Yonkers, NY, and Director of Development for the Archdiocesan District Addictions Ministry, joined our Zoom meeting to share his insights on how societal factors are negatively affecting our youth and playing a part in disconnecting them from their faith. Father Nikolas subsequently contributed a section to the Guidance Document from the perspective of faith and church and their role in providing our youth with a sense of connectedness.

In December 2025, we were joined by Marissa DeCesaris Siegel, DNP, CRNP, PMHNP-C, RN, and Assistant Practice Professor of Psychiatric Nursing in the Department of Family and Community Health at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing. Marissa discussed her experience working with children's mental health, highlighting the impact of social media and the importance of adequate sleep for children's wellbeing. She also stressed the need for increased mental health care for children.

The draft **Children's Mental Health Guidance Document** is currently under review by the National Philoptochos Executive Board, along with an accompanying one-page educational tri-fold flyer entitled "Children's Mental Health – A Quick Guide". Once approved, it is our goal to distribute these documents to our chapters and to also make them available on our National Philoptochos website.

I express my gratitude to all the members of the Educational Initiatives Committee for embracing the timely and crucial topic of children's mental health and for their diligence in gathering relevant information to share with our parish families.

Respectfully submitted,

Despina Denne, Chair
Educational Initiatives Committee