



Well-trained mental health professionals will work with you to plan a treatment that best meets your child's needs and includes their knowledge of best practices. The first place to start in identifying the right treatment is by having a thorough evaluation. During the evaluation, the clinician will collect history about your child and family, his or her symptoms, events leading up to the distress, school performance, relationships, and other issues. It often takes many sessions to collect the right information to do a comprehensive evaluation. During this time, the clinician may also ask you or your child to take some simple screening tests and other assessments to better understand the nature of your child's concerns. The tests are to make sure your child gets the best treatment and no hidden concerns are missed.

Therapy – What Should I Expect?

Therapy is the primary component of treating your child's mental health issues. Therapy is a form of treatment that can help children and families understand and resolve problems, modify behavior and make positive changes in their lives. There are several types of therapy that involve different approaches, techniques and interventions. At times, a combination of different therapy approaches may be helpful. In some cases, a combination of medication with therapy may be more effective.

It is important that parents and caregivers are closely involved in their child's treatment. The child may have therapy sessions alone with the therapist. At times, parents and caregivers may participate in therapy sessions with their child or may have private therapy sessions with their child's therapist.

Remember that due to confidentiality laws, the therapist may not be able to share everything the child tells the therapist in the sessions, which can be very frustrating to parents and caregivers. Be sure to ask your child's therapist what information they can and cannot share with you.

Medication – Part of the Larger Treatment Package

Medication can be an effective part of the treatment for several mental disorders of childhood and adolescence. A doctor's recommendation to use medication may raise concerns and questions in both the parents and the child. The physician who recommends medication should be experienced in treating psychiatric illnesses in children and adolescents. They should fully explain the reasons for medication use, what benefits the medication should provide, as well as possible risks and side effects. Other treatment alternatives should also be discussed. Child psychiatrists may not be available in some rural areas and often pediatricians prescribe medications for children. If parents still have serious questions or doubts about medication treatment, they should feel free to ask for a second opinion by a psychiatrist. For a sample list of questions to ask your doctor about medications, visit http://aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/psychiatric_medication_for_children_and_adolescents_part_iii_questions_to_ask

Talking with Children about Medication

Many children and teens are reluctant to take medication. They may be embarrassed, don't like to be different, or don't like the side effects. All of these are very real concerns. It is important to honestly discuss medication with your child so they understand how the medication will help them—not change them. They will be the same person, but medication can help them control their behavior and can help the unpleasant feelings go away.

Medication is most effective when it is taken at regular intervals so there is no lapse in time between doses. Preventing medication stops and starts can produce the greatest benefit and help determine whether the medication is actually helping. Establishing a regular time to give your child their medication helps establish a pattern.

Older children and teens who take medication on their own often do not take their medication regularly or stop taking it without talking to their parents or doctor. Explain why following prescription guidelines are important. Encourage your child to come to you with any medication-related concerns so you can work together to solve the problem or find another treatment option.

If your child is experiencing unpleasant side effects, talk with your doctor. Medication should never have a numbing effect on a child's energy, curiosity or enthusiasm.

Adapted from the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, "Facts for Families" and from Dr. Robert Franks, Connecticut Center for Effective Practice, kidsmentalhealthinfo.com



an initiative of



The Children's Mental Health Matters Campaign, an initiative of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMd), receives funding from the Maryland Department of Health – Behavioral Health Administration, the Maryland Family Network, and community sponsors. Together with the Maryland Coalition of Families, National Center for School Mental Health, MANSEF, and hundreds of community champions, we work to raise public awareness and acceptance of the importance of children's mental health to overall child and family wellbeing. We are grateful to the National Center for School Mental Health for their collaboration in creating these resources for families.