



# Helping Children with Behavioral Health Needs

A Basic Guidebook Just for Caregivers



Challenging behaviors can hurt your child's ability to learn and get along with others. They can also cause your child to fall behind in school, get into trouble, and may be a sign your child needs behavioral health care.



## **What are some of the warning signs?**

Your child may need to get help if he or she:

- Has more energy than other children.
- Is angry or has problems getting along with others.
- Has a hard time paying attention, listening, or following directions.
- Is sad or worried a lot.

# Are you worried about your child's behavior? Don't be – There's good news!

You can help your child deal with the problems he or she is having. Here are some things to keep in mind:

## The right diagnosis is the key.

- Make sure your child sees a behavioral health provider for an evaluation. Sometimes your child may need a full psychological assessment by a psychologist, which includes:
  - An interview with you and your child.
  - Questions that you, your child and/or child's teacher will answer.
  - Tests that help behavioral health providers better understand how your child thinks and feels.
- If the diagnosis isn't right, your child might not get the right type of treatment.



## Once you have the right diagnosis, you can work with your child and his or her behavioral health provider to create a treatment plan.

When you look at all of your treatment options, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Routine therapy may be the best option. It focuses on your child's thoughts and feelings and teaches him or her how to deal with problems.
- Some children work one-on-one with a therapist. Other children may need group or family therapy.
- Some children may need therapy only. Other children will do better with therapy and psychotropic medicine. In most cases, it is best to take your child to therapy on a routine basis for a few months before he or she starts medicine.
- If your child starts taking medicine, he or she should keep going to therapy. The medicine can help your child calm down and focus so he or she can learn new coping skills. It's important to take the medicine just as prescribed
- Your child's doctors will work to figure out what works best. This may change over time as your child gets better at talking about his or her thoughts and feelings.
- The provider may ask you to go to therapy with your child or may work with you alone. He or she will help you understand what's going on with your child and help you find strategies to try at home or school.





**Psychotropic medicines** are used to help treat behavioral or mental health issues such as anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and depression. It's important to have your child evaluated and know why the medicine might help. Talk with your child's doctor so you know the choices you have about treatment.

### **Keep an eye on anyside effects.**

Some psychotropic medicines can have side effects like changes in weight, greater risk for diabetes or changes in sleep. These medicines can even cause unexpected behavior or mood changes. It's important to follow up with the doctor who orders the medicine.

#### ***Example:***

Children who take “antipsychotics” need their weight and blood checked regularly to make sure the medicines aren't harming their health.

Some antipsychotic medicines are called:

- Risperidone (Risperdal)
- Quetiapine (Seroquel)
- Aripiprazole (Abilify)



## What To Do If You're Worried About Your Child's Behaviors or Mood

As a parent or caregiver, you are an important part of your child's treatment team. No one knows your child better than you! Work with your child's providers to make decisions as a team. It's okay to ask for a second opinion if you're not sure what's best.

### Ask Questions!

Ask your child's doctor questions so you can be involved and informed. Below are some questions you might want to ask if your child's doctor recommends medicine:

- ☐ Did my child have an evaluation by a behavioral health provider such as a psychologist, licensed clinical social workers, psychiatric nurse practitioner or psychiatrist? If so, do you have the results? If the answer is no, ask for one.
- ☐ Are there other treatments that my child should try first?
- ☐ What kind of medicine is this?
- ☐ What symptoms or behaviors does it help?
- ☐ Has this medicine been tested and approved for my child's age?
- ☐ What are the risks and possible side effects of this medicine?

- ☐ Have you done the medical evaluations needed for this medicine before we start it?
- ☐ Is it safe for my child to take this medicine with the other medicines he or she is taking?
- ☐ What other treatments does my child need while taking this medicine?

**If you have agreed to start your child on a medicine, be sure to ask:**

- ☐ How will I know if my child is getting better?
- ☐ How soon will my child get better?
- ☐ What happens if my child isn't getting better?
- ☐ What time of day should my child take this medicine?
- ☐ What should we do if we miss a dose?
- ☐ How often does my child need to take this medicine?
- ☐ What types of side effects should I watch out for and when should I call you?
- ☐ How often will you need to see my child after starting the medicine?
- ☐ What is your long-term plan to monitor my child while taking this medicine?
- ☐ How will you stay in contact with the other providers treating my child?

# Talk with Everyone Treating Your Child and Ask Them to Talk to Each Other

If your child starts taking medicine, it's important to talk with everyone who treats him or her. If someone other than your child's primary care provider (PCP) prescribes medicine to your child, tell your child's PCP about the medicine and any changes that are made to how it's prescribed.



## Call Us for Help!

If you need help finding a doctor or behavioral health provider, Passport is here to help! You may call us at **1-800-578-0603**. TDD/TTY users may call **711**.



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