

Mental illness, like physical illness, can happen to anyone

Has your child experienced any of the following?

- A big drop in school performance
- Poor grades even though they try hard
- Severe worry or anxiety (refuses to go to school, sleep, or join normal activities)
- Persistent nightmares
- Lots of physical complaints
- Hyperactive and/or cannot concentrate
- Extreme disobedience, anger, or aggression
- Lots of temper tantrums for no reason
- Threatens to harm self or others
- Big changes in sleep and/or eating habits
- Sexual acting out
- Severe sadness or hopelessness
- Severe mood swings
- Repeated use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Repeated threats to run away
- Opposes authority or commits crimes
- Strange thoughts, beliefs, feelings, or unusual behaviors



More Information:

www.ohiomindsmatter.org

SOURCES

1. *Mental Health Medications and Your Child: What You Need to Know*. The New York State Office of Mental Health (NYSOMH)
2. *Facts for Families #24, 25 & 103*. American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.
3. *Treatment of Children with Mental Illness*. National Institute of Mental Health.
4. *The Parent's How-to-Guide to Children's Mental Health Services in Massachusetts*. Boston Bar Association.



Youth Mental Health



A Parent's Guide

**INFORM
ACT
UNDERSTAND
MEDICATION**

INFORM

Mental Health Is:

- Strong relationships.
- Confidence and self-esteem.
- Enjoying school and hobbies.
- Feeling in control.
- Feeling mostly happy and satisfied.



When your child is sick or injured, he or she sees a doctor. Your child could also have problems with emotions or behavior that need professional help.

Mental illness is not caused by poor parenting, and treating it early in a child's life can help your child be successful.

ACT

Ask Yourself:

- Is my child's behavior very different from other children the same age?
- How often does my child behave in ways that trouble me?
- How long does this behavior last each time?
- Where does this behavior happen? (Are other people noticing it?)

Gently talk with your child.
An honest, open talk about feelings can help.

Who Can Help

If you are worried about your child's emotions or behavior you can speak with:



UNDERSTAND

What to Expect

When your child is evaluated for a mental health problem, the doctor will ask questions about your family history and your child's health and behavior. You and your child's teacher may be asked to fill out a questionnaire.

Diagnosis

The most common mental health conditions in children are:

- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders
- Anxiety Disorders
- Mood Disorders
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Conduct Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Substance Abuse

Treatment

If your child is diagnosed, the doctor might suggest therapy and/or medication. Psychotropic medications affect brain chemicals related to mood and behavior. Families and doctors should always weigh the benefits and risks of medication. It is important to understand and be involved in this decision.

Your Rights/Consent

- Informed consent means the doctor explains the benefits and risks of treatment and you give permission.
- You have the right to refuse treatment.
- There are laws regarding privacy and confidentiality.
- For help on what questions to ask.

Follow-Up

During treatment, it is important for both you and the doctor to monitor your child frequently. You might be asked to:

- Complete checklists about your child's behavior and medication
- Keep follow-up appointments
- Take classes to learn more about helping your child

Helping Your Child

- Help with homework.
- Encourage good sleep.
- Talk together often, discuss values.
- Model positive behavior.
- Be supportive when things go wrong.
- Help with stress and negative emotions.
- Volunteer at school.
- Ask your child's opinion and listen to his or her stories.
- Praise often.

MEDICATION

Fast Facts

- Mental health medications can help children and teens with mental health problems feel better and do better at home and school.
- Medications can have short-term side effects, including:
 - Stomach problems
 - Weight gain
 - High blood sugar
 - Problems with muscle control
 - Sleeping too much or too little
 - Suicidal thoughts
- Everybody is different. How your child responds to medication depends on age, diagnosis, and body and brain chemistry.
- Children need a careful medical and mental health exam before starting a mental health medication.
- Many behavioral problems can be treated with counseling or therapy for both the child and the parents.

What You Need to Know

- Make sure your child has a medical and mental health exam before starting any new mental health medication.
- Your physician will tell you the right dose and period of time to take it before making a change.
- Your child will respond better to the medicine if it is

taken the way your doctor directs. Skipping doses will cause the medication to work less well. Giving extra doses can be dangerous for your child.

- Ask the doctor about any problems to look for in your child after starting medication.
- Always tell the doctor if you plan to change or stop your child's medication and work with the doctor to make a plan for careful follow-up.
- Counseling or therapy can help improve behavior, decrease sleep problems, reduce anger, and manage symptoms.

Ask Your Child's Doctor

- What is my child's diagnosis?
- How will mental health medication help my child?
- What side effects could my child feel?
- Is my child taking any high doses of medication? If yes, ask why.
- If your child taking more than one mental health medication, ask why.
- What are the long-term health risks of my child's medication?
- Are there treatments besides medication that might help my child?
- What can I do at home to help control my child's mental health problem besides medication?