

FINDING THE RIGHT CARE

Introduction

Your child's health care is important. Finding the right care is not always easy, especially when it comes to finding mental health care.

More than 1 in 5 children have emotional or developmental problems and there is a shortage of mental health professionals trained to identify and treat these disorders. Finding appropriate care is important to your child's development.

Appropriate and affordable care should be every child's right.

FIRST STEPS

- Begin by visiting AACAP's web site: www.aacap.org. There you will find information on different problems that children and adolescents experience.
- Once you decide to seek help for your child, a good place to begin is with your child's doctor. Pediatricians and family physicians are often able to deal with some problems in their own offices. They also can help you find the type of care your child needs.
- Talk to your child's school counselor. They will know the professionals and other resources available in your community.
- Talk with other parents who might be able to tell you how they found someone to help their child. For parent organizations, see More Information below.

TYPES OF CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS

Children can receive mental health care from different health care specialists. Professionals with specific training in the emotional and behavioral care of children and adolescents include:

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist is a physician who specializes in the diagnosis and the treatment of disorders of thinking, feeling and/or behavior affecting children, adolescents, and their families. A child and adolescent psychiatrist offers families the advantages of a medical education, the medical traditions of professional ethics, and medical responsibility for providing comprehensive care.

Developmental/Behavioral Pediatrician is a physician specializing in the emotional and behavioral issues of children and their families. They identify and manage developmental and behavior disorders that occur throughout childhood and adolescence.

Pediatric Neurologist is a physician with specialized training in diagnosing and managing brain and nervous system disorders that occur in childhood and adolescence.

General Adult Psychiatrist is a physician specializing in psychiatric disorders in adults. Their training and experience in working with child and adolescents varies. However, some psychiatrists will see children or adolescents on a case-by-case basis.

Child Psychologist has training in the mental health needs of children and adolescents. Child psychologists meet requirements to practice general psychology. They should receive special certification to treat children and adolescents. The level of training varies and they may practice independently or under a licensed supervisor.

Social Worker or Counselor has different levels of training and may practice independently or under a licensed supervisor. It is important to ask when making an appointment if the social worker or counselor has specific child and family training.

YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE

There are many different types of health insurance plans. Some plans require you to only see doctors and therapists who have agreed to work under the insurance plan's guidelines or in their 'network'. If you have this type of plan, it is important you call your insurance company first, or visit their web site, to obtain a list of those professionals.

Every health plan must provide access to a mental health specialist with education and experience appropriate for your child's needs, and who practices within a reasonable distance of your home. If your health plan cannot find a professional in their network that is right for your child, you have the right to ask them to let you take your child to a mental health specialist out of their network. In those situations, the health plan should reimburse the treatment at no additional cost to you. For more information, please see *A Guide to Using Health Insurance Benefits*.

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD

Insurance for mental health care is often different than for physical health care. Mental health benefits are often not equal to benefits for physical illness. Services may have higher co-payments and limits on the number of visits. There may also be a shortage of mental health professionals in your area. If there is a shortage, it is important for you to advocate for your child to ensure that children with mental illness receive the best treatment available.

When you are looking for help for your child there are different resources you may use. Your pediatrician can help you determine the services or treatment your child may need or they can refer you to a specialist. Your insurance company or employee assistance program can help you find appropriate providers. Your school may help you with special accommodations or services your child may need in school.

Another form of advocacy is to get involved at your state or federal level and educate our law makers on mental illness and the services children and adolescents need to live healthy and productive lives. Contact your state legislators and members of Congress to arrange a meeting in your home town.

For more information on these issues and how to contact your Members of Congress, please visit AACAP's legislative section of our web site at <http://www.aacap.org/cs/advocacy>. You may also call the AACAP Department of Government Affairs at 800.333.7636 ext 108.

MORE INFORMATION

Finding the right professional to help you and your child is not always easy. The following web sites offer additional information that can help you find care for your child and adolescent.

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org; 800.950.6264
- Mental Health America: www.nmha.org; 800.969.6642
- Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (FFFCMH): www.ffcmh.org; 240.403.1901
- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD): www.chadd.org; 800.233.4050
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP): www.aap.org; 847.434.4000

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