



HEALTHY MINDS: HOW TO GET HELP

Feeling sad, anxious, worried, stressed, lonely or overwhelmed is normal in everyday life. However, a person may have a mental illness or disorder if these feelings:

- Last longer than three months
- Create difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships
- Negatively impact school performance or health
- Prevent the ability to complete routine tasks or enjoyment of favorite activities
- Cause low self-esteem or thoughts of suicide

Mental illnesses and disorders are highly treatable and manageable, especially if caught early. [The Healthy Minds: Family Discussion Guide](#) and the Healthy Minds Assessment Tools for [depression](#), [anxiety](#), and [loneliness and isolation](#) can help families determine quickly if a family member needs help with their mental health.

Mental illnesses and disorders cannot be willed away and should not be ignored. Here are some ways families can get the mental health help they need.

TALK TO A PROFESSIONAL

If your child has a primary care provider, talk to them about your concerns. The doctor may then want to give your child a comprehensive medical physical to rule out any underlying medical condition that may be causing your child to struggle emotionally. They may also review your family history and do a mental health assessment to determine when the mental health issues began, how long they have lasted, how often they occur, and if they keep your child from doing their usual activities. Depending on the results, the doctor may then refer your child to a mental health professional for further evaluation and treatment. You can learn about the different types of mental health professionals at [Mental Health America](#).

If your child does not have a primary care provider, families can talk to a school counselor, psychologist or nurse. It is not necessary to be diagnosed with mental illness to speak with a school counselor, psychologist or nurse. You can talk to them even if you are just a little bit worried about your child. They can help families figure out what their options are without judgement. All discussions with your school counselor, psychologist or nurse are confidential and free. School counselors and psychologists also keep a comprehensive list of local community resources that families can use and will know what is free and what requires insurance. They can then provide referrals for families.

School counselors provide short-term counseling. Many schools have a mental health counselor that students can be referred to for longer-term counseling.





SEEK TREATMENT

Caregivers and medical professionals should work together to create a treatment plan that works best for your child and family. Therapies such as play therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, family therapy and individual therapy can help significantly. Complementary and Alternative Medicine techniques like stress management, meditation, yoga and acupuncture may also help. Medication is also highly effective and is considered safe if properly given and monitored. A licensed health care professional may recommend a combination of therapy and medication to be the most effective treatment to manage mental health disorders.

The beginning of treatment can be overwhelming and frustrating. It may take time to find an affordable, qualified mental health professional who best fits your family.

Finding the right medication type and dosage can take some trial and error. Some medications also have some side effects and can take up to four weeks to show their full benefit.

Therapies and medications can help ease symptoms and promote a positive lifestyle. They provide consistent coping mechanisms, or, in the case of medication, help keep brain chemicals balanced. When an effective treatment plan is in place and people start to feel better, many assume treatment is no longer needed so they scale back treatments or medications or stop completely. Abruptly stopping medication can trigger difficult withdrawal symptoms and significantly worsen chemical imbalances. These chemical imbalances may result in harmful or suicidal thoughts and can ultimately lead to suicide if not managed. It is crucial to only change medication or therapy plans under the supervision of a licensed professional.

Families can help their child stick to their treatment plan by:

- Offering support, understanding, patience and encouragement.
- Setting reminders to take prescribed medications.
- Supervising their child when taking their medication.
- Making sure they have transportation to therapy appointments.
- Seeking out peer groups or other support services in your community.
- Watching for signs that the prescribed treatment is not working or needs to be adjusted.
- Communicating frequently with doctors, teachers and school mental health services personnel.





PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS

Schools should be included in your child’s larger treatment plan. Teachers, nurses, school counselors and school psychologists can work with you and your child to develop individualized plans to manage their learning and schoolwork, help your child put identified coping strategies into practice, provide short-term in-house counseling services, administer medication, and refer families to community organizations that provide peer support, services and education. They can also look for signs of worsening or improving symptoms and notify you of any changes.

Your PTA can also help connect you to school, family and community supports and services.

CONSIDERING COVERAGE

Navigating how to find and pay for medical care while your child is experiencing a mental health crisis can be overwhelming, stressful and confusing, which can lead to costly mistakes or prevent families from seeking the care they need.

Learn what your insurance coverage or financial options are before a mental health emergency happens.

If You Have Medical Insurance

1. Does it cover for mental health services for your child? Yes No Don't Know
2. What mental health services are covered? _____
3. Is there a co-pay? Yes No Don't Know
4. How much is the copay? _____
5. Does your insurance require pre-approval for mental health services? Yes No Don't Know

If You Do Not Have Medical Insurance

Your school counselor, school psychologist or school nurse can connect your family with affordable mental health services that can help.

