



*Canadian Psychiatric
Research Foundation*

When Something's Wrong O

Ideas for Families

Working with
Your Health
Practitioner

Working with Your Health Practitioner



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Where to Start?

As emphasized in every section of this handbook, it is again important to note that early identification and treatment can greatly improve outcomes for young people with mood, behaviour and thinking problems. Chances are you've tried to learn as much as you can about what might be wrong with your child, and hopefully this handbook has helped. However, you won't know exactly what you are dealing with until you obtain a professional diagnosis from a health practitioner (e.g., psychiatrist, psychologist). It is often good to get a second or third opinion, especially if you are not comfortable with the recommendations or advice you have been given.

A professional diagnosis for a child with a problem often provides a level of relief and hope for you, the child, and other family members, because you find out what is really wrong and then can move forward in dealing with it. A professional diagnosis also helps to prevent young people from being "labeled" with something other than what might be wrong (e.g., a "problem child" might really have a learning disability; an adolescent

who is "cold" and "aloof" with others may have clinical depression).

During the process of diagnosis, any coexisting or co-occurring conditions present in the young person will need to be evaluated. If there are co-occurring disorders present, in some cases, your doctor or health practitioner may feel it is best to treat certain conditions at the same time, or may wish to treat one condition before treating another condition.

During the assessment and treatment phases, it's important to give your health practitioner as much information as possible, such as, if your child has been treated previously for any disorder or condition, if your child was/still is on any form of medication or natural supplements, how long any medication was/has been taken, and if your child has previously been treated with psychotherapy. These days, if one treatment doesn't work, the odds are good that another one will, and new medications and treatments are continually being developed through research.

As a parent, your support, participation, and positive outlook are crucial to enable your child to build coping skills and resilience. You spend much more time with your child than any therapist, teacher, or doctor. So, don't underestimate your strengths! However, be prepared for this process to take some time. And, take a notebook along with you, so that you can write down all the information you will undoubtedly uncover and need to remember in order to aid your child in receiving the appropriate treatment. You may also wish to bring along another adult (e.g., partner or friend) for extra support.

If you are not sure where to start, two good places are **your family doctor** and **your child's school**.

Your family doctor can advise you on options, refer you to other mental health practitioners, or prescribe medication, if necessary. Your doctor is also a good first step, since many health practitioners will require a referral from your doctor in order to do their work.

Your child's school is also a good place to obtain more information on how to help your child. Many people may not be aware of special services and supports that a school and school boards

are able to provide or direct you to (e.g., school psychologists and social workers, speech-language pathologists, guidance counsellors, behaviour resource teachers, special education teachers, child and youth workers, parent support groups). These supports and services will, of course, vary from school to school, and province to province, but start by asking your child's teacher or school principal for information.

Additional places to obtain health services and information include:

- The *Resources* section in the back of this handbook
- Yellow Pages under "mental health," "health," "social services," "suicide prevention," "crisis intervention services," "hotlines," "hospitals," or "physicians"
- In a crisis: emergency room doctor at a hospital may provide temporary help for an emotional problem and can direct you further
- Community mental health centres
- Hospital psychiatry departments and outpatient clinics
- General hospital outpatient clinics

- University or medical school-affiliated programs
- Local public health departments (information and programs)
- Local public libraries; local school libraries
- Family service organizations, social agencies (e.g., Children's Aid), clergy, and faith organizations (e.g., churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other places of worship)
- Private clinics and facilities
- Employee assistance programs
- Local medical and/or psychiatric associations
- The Canadian Counselling Association (please see *Resources* in the back of this handbook for contact information)

Types of Health Practitioners and Treatment Options

Many kinds of treatment options are possible. Treatment will depend on the condition and needs of your child, the recommendations of your family doctor and/or mental health practitioner, available financial resources, and available treatment programs in your community. Learn all you can about your options, and

research the availability of treatment programs in your region. Depending on your child's condition or disorder, you may need to put your child on a waiting list. Don't be afraid to ask whatever questions you have.

Treatment options may include one-to-one or group therapy, medication, in-patient care, day treatment programs, or a combination of any of these.

Descriptions of some of the health practitioners who may help to treat your child, and some important facts to remember, follow below.

Psychiatrist

A Psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specializes in psychiatry – the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental and emotional disorders.

He/she can diagnose, prescribe medication and treat patients (both as in-patients and out-patients). Psychiatrists work in a variety of settings in the areas of clinical practice, education and research. Services of a psychiatrist are usually covered through your provincial health care plan, so you are normally not billed directly, but it is always good to double check how payment will be made.

For more information, contact:

Canadian Psychiatric Association

141 Laurier Ave. West
Suite 701
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J3
Phone: (613) 234-2815
E-mail: cpa@cpa-apc.org
Web: www.cpa-apc.org

Psychologist

A Psychologist is a licensed doctoral-level professional who is trained and educated to perform assessments (including testing, treatment, and psychological research), and works in a variety of settings. He/she can assess, diagnose, and treat patients in the areas of behaviour, emotion, personality and mental processes. Psychologists cannot prescribe medication (although many work closely with psychiatrists who can).

The clinical assessment and testing that a psychologist performs can identify other issues your child may have such as language and learning disabilities, AD/HD, and other mental disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety). Depending on where you live, a psychologist may be covered under your provincial health care

plan or through your extended health care benefits plan. Find out how much you may be covered for, and then talk to your psychologist about billing before pursuing assessment or treatment.

Psychological Associates are Master's level practitioners who also provide a range of psychological services.

For more information, contact:

Canadian Psychological Association

141 Laurier Ave. West
Suite 702
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J3
Phone: (613) 237-2144
Toll-free: 1-888-472-0657
Web: www.cpa.ca

Social Worker

Social Workers are practitioners who help individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their well-being. They work in a variety of settings such as family services agencies, children's aid organizations, general and psychiatric hospitals, and school boards, often as part of a multi-disciplinary team. They become registered (or certified or licensed) by becoming a member of

the regulatory body in the province where they work. Social workers aim to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems. A Bachelor of Social Work is the minimum educational requirement for entry into the profession, but postgraduate education leading to a master's or doctoral degree is also available.

A social worker may work as your child's therapist, or case worker, facilitating plans for your child in the home, school and community, but cannot prescribe medication. Depending on where you live, a social worker may be covered under your provincial health care plan or through your extended health care benefits plan. Find out what your options are, and talk to your social worker about billing before pursuing treatment.

For more information, contact:

Canadian Association of Social Workers

383 Parkdale Avenue
Suite 402
Ottawa, ON K1Y 4R4
Phone: (613) 729-6668
E-mail: casw@casw-acts.ca
Web: www.casw-acts.ca

Child and Youth Worker

A Child and Youth Worker (also called child and youth counsellor), may work with an organization, school or treatment centre, and usually provides counselling, guidance, and assistance for troubled young people and their families. Child and youth workers come from a variety of educational backgrounds, work in a variety of settings, and often work as part of a multi-disciplinary team. A child and youth worker may work as your child's case worker, facilitating plans for your child in the home, school and community. A child and youth worker cannot prescribe medication.

For more information, contact:

Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations

Web: www.cyccanada.ca

Pharmacist

A Pharmacist is a health practitioner trained in the preparation and dispensing of drugs/medications. Today, pharmacists are often able to provide you with information on a variety of health and lifestyle

issues. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your pharmacist. Many pharmacies are now able to print out specific information for you to read and take with you. As well, many pharmacy chains (e.g., Shoppers Drug Mart) now have useful Web sites you can visit to look for information on particular conditions and/or medications.

For more information, contact:

Canadian Pharmacists Association

1785 Alta Vista Drive
Ottawa, ON K1G 3Y6
Phone: (613) 523-7877
Toll-free: 1-800-917-9489
E-mail:
info@pharmacists.ca
Web:
www.pharmacists.ca

Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists

Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists are professionals who evaluate and treat people who have speech, language and learning, or hearing disorders. Working with educators, medical and rehabilitation personnel, psychologists, and social workers, these

professionals are usually part of a comprehensive team of rehabilitation specialists. A master's degree or equivalent is the recognized standard of qualification for speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

For more information, contact:

Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists

401 – 200 Elgin Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 1L5
Phone: (613) 567-9968
Toll-free: 1-800-259-8519
E-mail: caslpa@caslpa.ca
Web: www.caslpa.ca

Depending on your financial situation, some of these practitioner fees may be difficult for you or your family to afford, especially on a long-term basis. Some practitioners and treatment centres operate on a "sliding scale," allowing individuals to pay what they can, given their financial situations. For more information, ask your family doctor, or try your local chapter of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) at 416-484-7750, or www.cmha.ca. CMHA chapters usually keep a list of mental health resources and treatment

centres in the areas they serve. Some of these services may offer sliding scale payment options.

Questions To Ask Your Health Practitioners

Knowledge is empowerment. The more you find out about your options, and your child's treatment and recovery process, the more successful you will be. You will also be more confident in the decisions you choose to make regarding your child. Here are some questions to guide you in getting the answers you need.

General Questions

- **What are your qualifications and how long have you been practising in your field?**
- **Are you a regulated health services provider (i.e., licensed and regulated by the profession's governing body)?**
- **What is wrong with my child, and what has caused the problem? How serious is it? Can this disorder be "cured"?**
- **How common is this disorder?**
- **Will the school treat my child any differently?**
- **How can I explain my child's illness to my child and to others?**
- **How do I get my child to go to an appointment with me?**
- **Can you explain the following terms...?**
Note: If you are unclear about any new or unfamiliar terms, ask about them. If you have difficulty understanding, perhaps due to a language barrier or a high level of stress, you may want to bring a trusted friend or relative who can help you communicate and gather information.
- **How will my child's condition impact on his/her life at home, school (e.g., learning), and in the community?**
Note: If your child has any specific interests (e.g., sports or the arts), you may wish to ask about any potential impact on these activities.
- **Can you recommend any support program for me in this process (e.g., a parent support group)?**
- **Is there anything else I should know about my role as a caregiver or my child's situation?**

On Treatment Programs

- **What services and support will you be providing? Who else will be involved?**
- **Do you have a specific approach you will be taking with my child?**
- **How will you make a diagnosis?**
- **You've given me test results and/or a diagnosis. Now, what do they really mean?**
- **What are the validated treatment options for this condition, and how can I find out more about them?**
- **How long do you think my child's treatment will take and how often will we need to see you?**
- **What can I do to support my child's treatment at home?**
- **Can the treatment result in any harm to my child? Is my child at any risk?**
- **How will failure of the treatment affect my child and family?**
- **Has the treatment been validated scientifically? Can you review the evidence with me?**
- **How will the treatment be integrated into my child's daily activities?**
- **How successful has this treatment been for other children?**
- **Will my child be treated by anyone else, besides yourself? If so, what are their qualifications?**
- **How can I tell if the treatment is working and when will it begin to work? What can I expect to notice when my child is improving?**
- **Will this treatment program prepare me to continue therapy at home once the program is over?**
- **What is the cost, time commitment, and location of this treatment program?**
- **What if this treatment does not work? What are the other options?**

On Medications

- **Are you able to prescribe medications? If not, who will prescribe medications, if needed.**
- **What is the goal of my child taking this medication? Will it help?**
- **How do these medications work?**
- **What are the potential side effects of the medication(s) you are prescribing?**
- **How much will they cost?**
- **Are they dangerous? Are they safe?**

- ❑ **How will my child's medication impact his/her life? Will it affect any of his/her normal activities?**
 - ❑ **How do I administer and monitor my child's medication?**
 - ❑ **Will this medication interact with any other medications or supplements my child is taking?**
 - ❑ **What if this medication does not work? What are the other options?**
 - ❑ **What are the risks if my child has to switch to a different medication?**
 - ❑ **What will happen if my child misses taking medication or goes off his/her medication?**
 - ❑ **How can I help ensure my child is taking any required medication as prescribed?**
 - ❑ **When will my child be able to stop taking this medication? What are the long-term effects?**
- Keep important phone numbers visible in your home. Keep important phone numbers of health practitioners, your child's teacher, and emergency phone numbers in a central, visible place for all members of the family to use, if needed.
 - Patience will be required. Amid the treatment, meetings, and support groups, don't forget to make time for everyday activities like ball games, movie nights, and parent-teacher nights.
 - Take care of yourself and of your relationships. Working through the process of getting the right help for a child who is not well can be rewarding at times, but horribly frustrating and stressful at other times. It is so important that during this process you take care of yourself and your close relationships. Take the time to work out your own self-care routine and a plan to strengthen and preserve your close relationships during this difficult time. You, your relationships and your child will be better off if you do.

Final Tips

- Write everything down. Keep a notebook or diary of the diagnosis and treatment process you go through with your child. Don't forget to include meetings and evaluations with all health practitioners, and the dates that these occurred.



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