



*Canadian Psychiatric
Research Foundation*

When Something's Wr ng

0

Ideas for Families



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At Cowan, that's how we feel about our partnership with the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation. By donating funds from the Frank Cowan Foundation, we are contributing to the health and well-being of families in our community.

The Frank Cowan Foundation exists because of the success of Cowan Insurance Group and our Operating Companies: Frank Cowan Company, Cowan Insurance Brokers, and Cowan Wright Beauchamp. We are proud to support the production of this handbook, which provides coping strategies for families to deal with the people they care about the most – their children.

The way we see it, we're not only contributing to a valuable resource guide, we're focusing on areas that matter to you, our clients, business partners and employees.

We care about what you care about.



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The Frank Cowan Foundation

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Introduction

When Something's Wrong: Ideas for Families has been written as a companion handbook to *When Something's Wrong: Ideas for Teachers*. It has been designed to give parents, caregivers or other family members useful strategies to cope with and assist children and youth with mood, behaviour, or thinking difficulties (e.g., social withdrawal, disorganized thinking, hostility, aggression, agitation).

A child's difficult behaviour can create a lot of stress. Even more than the frustration felt by us, as parents, we must recognize, with empathy, that our child's difficult behaviour creates tremendous stress for him/her as well. Additional stress is felt by teachers, coaches, friends, and others in the child's social environment. For example, the child or his/her siblings may be teased by others. The more difficult or unusual the behaviour, the more stress caused for everyone involved in the child's life.

Anxiety and
Anxiety Disorders

Autism and Autism
Spectrum Disorders

Borderline
Personality Disorder
(BPD)

Eating Disorders

Impulse Control
Disorders

Mood
Disorders


Schizophrenia

Suicide

Tourette Syndrome
(TS)

Working with Your
Health Practitioner

Resources




As a parent, at some point, you may ask yourself, “Is my child’s behaviour normal, or should I seek help?” In many cases, behavioural disturbances are temporary and a normal part of growing up; in others, they may reflect a mental disorder. A mental disorder is a disturbance of brain functioning that causes problems with mood, behaviour, or thinking. The specific disorders are diagnosed according to internationally recognized criteria.

Keep in mind that all of the behaviours and conditions discussed in this handbook occur on a spectrum from normal (although irritating or concerning) to serious, with varying degrees of frequency, intensity and duration. The more frequent or intense, and the longer your child’s behaviour continues, the more likely that you may need to seek help from a health practitioner.

All behaviours, moods and thinking are extremely complicated brain functions and arise from a variety of internal (e.g., genetic, learned responses) and external (e.g., social situations, injury) factors. Mental disorders as we understand them today involve the malfunction of brain systems that usually

control behaviour, mood and thinking. The type of mental disorder is identified by the types of disturbances found in each of these areas. Recent research into these disorders has identified a wide variety of structural (how the brain looks) and functional (how the brain acts) abnormalities, and more are being uncovered as new technologies for studying the brain are developed and applied. Various neurobiological theories have been advanced and tested using these new research methods, and every year brings more information and better understanding.

If your child has a mental disorder, you are not alone. Mental disorders occur in about 20% of the population – that’s one out of every five people in Canada. Although it isn’t known yet exactly what causes most mental disorders, many factors (e.g., genetics, the environment) do play a role, and research continues to reveal new discoveries. In fact, the main focus of the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation, the author of this handbook, is research in the mental health field.



It is known, however, that mental disorders are **not caused by poor parenting or weak willpower**, and the good news is that identifying and treating a mental disorder early in a child's life can really improve the outcome for the child. Like any other illness in children, such as diabetes or epilepsy, obtaining the right diagnosis, treatment and support early on can make the condition much easier to manage in the long run and help children to lead normal lives.

There are many interventions for mental disorders in the marketplace. However, very few have undergone careful scientific evaluation and have been demonstrated to be effective. Therefore, when seeking treatment, always find out the information about evidence of treatment effectiveness and possible side effects of treatment. Always seek advice from reputable professionals and information from reputable sources. Obtain a second opinion regarding diagnosis or treatment if you are not certain or have misgivings.

Getting the right treatment and support for your child is not always easy. In order to get a proper diagnosis or find out what services are

offered in your community, you may come up against a number of roadblocks. This handbook has been designed to make this road a bit easier to travel. A wealth of information exists about mental health and mental disorders, and sometimes it is hard to know how to use it. Here is a place to start.

How to Use this Handbook

This handbook is useful on three levels:

- 1. It can help reassure you that your child's behaviour is normal for his/her age and stage of development.** The coping strategies outlined in each section of the handbook can still be useful to form a basis for consistent behaviour management and lower anxiety in your child's life and in your own.
- 2. It can assist you in knowing when to seek help or extra support. Please remember that this handbook is not a diagnostic tool and does not list all disorders.** The diagnosis and treatment of the disorders described here are complex and should only be undertaken by suitably qualified health practitioners. For more information and tips for navigating the mental health system, please see *Working With Your Health Practitioner* in this handbook.

Managing Problem
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in Children

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3. **If your child has already been diagnosed with one of these conditions, it can suggest many practical and useful coping strategies and direct you to resources and supports in your community.** These strategies go along with the classroom strategies for teachers outlined in the “Ideas for Teachers” handbook mentioned earlier. Using both handbooks together and working with your child’s teacher(s) will help to provide consistency of approach in managing your child’s behaviour.

A team involving parents, teachers, school support staff (e.g., psychologists, social workers, guidance counsellors, behaviour resource teachers, speech-language pathologists, child and youth workers), public health nurses and other health practitioners is often required to provide the best assistance to children and adolescents.

Content

When Something's Wrong: Ideas for Families is divided into sections – one for each symptom family (e.g., Mood Disorders) and each disorder (e.g., Depression). A brief description, a list of behavioural characteristics, suggested coping strategies, and some additional resources can be found for each disorder. Sections can be used independently, or in combination with each other. A more general *Resources* section and Order Form, if you wish to order more copies of the teacher or family handbook, can be found at the back of the handbook. Please note that all data included in this handbook (i.e., statistics and figures) is based on available scientific literature at the time of printing.

Table of Contents

Managing Problem Behaviour in Children

Anxiety and Anxiety Disorders

- General Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder

Autism and Autism Spectrum Disorders

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

Eating Disorders

- Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa

Impulse Control Disorders

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)
- Conduct Disorder (CD)
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

Mood Disorders

- Bipolar Affective Disorder
- Depression

Schizophrenia

Suicide

Tourette Syndrome (TS)

Working with Your Health Practitioner

Resources

Order Form: Teacher Handbook, Family Handbook

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