

Know Where To Find Help For Your Child

Parents are often concerned about their child's emotional health or behavior but they do not know where to start to get help. And, the mental health system can be complicated and difficult for parents to understand. A child's emotional distress often causes disruption to both the parent's and the child's world. Parents may have difficulty being objective and may blame themselves or worry that others, such as teachers or family members, will blame them.

If you are worried about your child's emotions or behavior, you can start by talking to friends, family members, your spiritual counselor, your child's school counselor or your child's pediatrician or family physician about your concerns. If you think your child needs help, you should get as much information as possible about where to find help for your child. Parents should be cautious about using Yellow Pages phone directories as their only source of information and referral.

Other sources of information include: Employee Assistance Program through your employer. The local medical or psychiatric society. Local mental health association. County mental health department. Local hospitals or medical centers with psychiatric services. Department of Psychiatry in a nearby medical school. National Advocacy Organizations (NAMI, Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, NMHA). National professional organizations (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychiatric Association).

The variety of mental health practitioners can be confusing. There are psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, psychiatric nurses, counselors, pastoral counselors and people who call themselves therapists. Few states regulate the practice of psychotherapy, so almost anyone can call themselves a Psychotherapist. Practitioners are:

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist - a licensed (M.D. or D.O.) physician who is a fully trained psychiatrist and has two additional years of advanced training beyond general psychiatry with children, adolescents and families. Child and adolescent psychiatrists who pass the national examination administered by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology are board certified in child and adolescent psychiatry. Child and adolescent psychiatrists provide medical/psychiatric evaluation and a full range of treatment interventions for emotional and behavioral problems and psychiatric disorders. As physicians, child and adolescent psychiatrists can prescribe and monitor medications.

Psychiatrist - a physician, a medical doctor, whose education includes a medical degree (M.D. or D.O.) and at least four additional years of study and training. Psychiatrists are licensed by the states as physicians. Psychiatrists who pass the national examination administered by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology are board certified in psychiatry. Psychiatrists provide medical/psychiatric evaluation and treatment for emotional and behavioral problems and psychiatric disorders. As physicians, psychiatrists can prescribe and monitor medications.



Psychologist - some possess a master's degree (M.S.) in psychology while others have a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D.) in clinical, educational, counseling or research psychology. Psychologists are licensed by most states. Psychologists can provide psychological evaluation and treatment for emotional and behavioral problems and disorders. Psychologists also provide psychological testing and assessments.

Therapist - some have a bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S.W. or B.S.), although they are typically in a Master Level program or Internship Program working towards achieving an M.F.T. degree and license (Marriage and Family Therapist, formerly MFCC). In most states, therapists take an examination to be licensed as a Therapist. Therapists provide most forms of psychotherapy.

Social Worker - some have a bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S.W. or B.S.), however most social workers have earned a master's degree (M.S. or M.S.W.). In most states social workers can take an examination to be licensed as clinical social workers. Social workers provide most forms of psychotherapy.

Parents can try to find a mental health professional that has advanced training and experience with children, adolescents, and families. Parents should always ask about the professionals training and experience. However, it is also very important to find a comfortable match between your child, your family and the mental health professional.