

All families have problems at times. Some problems are minor, while others mean that your child may be out of control. If you feel unable to deal with your child's problems by yourself, get help. There are many treatment options that may be right for you and your child.

What types of problems need professional help?

There are different kinds of problems that may mean that your child needs professional help. Your child may have problems with behavior such as:

- abusing alcohol or drugs
- being sexually aggressive
- bullying others at home, school, or work
- constantly being late or skipping school
- destroying property
- disobeying rules or breaking the law
- repeatedly running away from home
- self-harm (such as cutting or burning themselves on purpose)
- stealing from family members or others

You may also be concerned about your child's mental health. Children and teens may need treatment if they show signs of:

- anxiety
- depression
- bipolar disorder
- eating disorders
- learning problems
- obsessive-compulsive disorder
- schizophrenia

What types of treatment are available?

Parent Support Groups:

Most communities have a variety of parent support groups. These groups offer support and information. Talking with other people who face the same challenges can help you cope. Support groups usually focus on a particular problem, such as drug abuse, ADHD, or depression. Most support groups are free and you don't need a referral to join. Check with your child's school, local community mental health center, or the yellow pages for a support group that might help.

Outpatient Therapy:

Outpatient therapy may include:

- psychological testing
- individual (one-on-one) therapy with your child
- medicines
- group therapy (This is very helpful for eating disorders, self-harm, and substance abuse)

Therapy is provided by psychologists, social workers, psychiatric nurses, and psychiatrists. Services are provided through community mental health centers, clinics, or in the therapist's office.

Family therapy can help the whole family to make changes. Often mental health problems are hard to change without support from the family. Many child and teen problems improve a great deal when the family changes how they deal with the child.

Contact your healthcare provider or your child's school counselor for a referral. You may also look in the yellow pages under mental health services.

Day Treatment: Day treatment is a special kind of school that provides therapy as well as classes. It is helpful when a child's behaviors are so out of control that they can no longer be in a regular school setting.

Children can return to a regular school once their behavior improves and they are willing to follow rules. The child lives at home while attending a day treatment program.

Home-Based Therapy: In home-based therapy, mental health specialists come to your home each week. They support parents and help the family find healthy ways to deal with issues. Home-based therapy is for families with severe problems such as financial stress, major illness, or abuse. The goal is to keep the family together and keep the child from needing to be treated in a hospital.

Out-of-Home Placement:

Sometimes children need to be removed from the home in order to solve their problems. The home may be unsafe or the child may be completely out of control. The child may be placed in a foster home, group home, or residential treatment center.

Children placed outside of the home usually have both individual and group therapy. Residential treatment centers provide 24-hour medical and mental health care for people under age 21 years. In addition to mental health therapy, residential treatment centers also provide schooling, medicines that are needed, and help adjusting when they go back to the community. Families are usually involved in treatment. This helps them to prepare for when the child is able to return home. Out-of-home placement can last from a few weeks to several years. It depends on how severe the problem is and on how much support the child has at home.

Inpatient Treatment:

Inpatient treatment is the most intense level of care for your child. Inpatient means that your child is put in a hospital. Usually the child is in a locked unit where they can be watched and treated. The child receives 24-hour care from mental health and medical professionals.

Inpatient treatment can be either voluntary (parent agrees) or involuntary (ordered by the court). It is used in emergencies, such as when the child is a danger to themselves or others.

Children may need inpatient treatment if they are:

- mentally ill (such as hearing voices)
- not eating, not sleeping, or not able to go to school
- addicted to drugs and need medical care to detoxify
- putting themselves in unsafe situations, are suicidal, or if they have attacked others

How long the child needs to be in the hospital depends on the severity of the child's behaviors and symptoms. Hospital stays of only 2 or 3 days are common. Some children need to stay longer if they have very severe problems.

How do I know which option is best for my child?

If you are concerned about your child's behavior, talk with your child's healthcare provider or a mental health specialist. Your provider or therapist will ask about the child's symptoms and any drug or alcohol use. Once the child has been diagnosed, the provider will recommend treatment.

As a general rule, treatment begins with the least restrictive option possible. Your child will not be moved out of the home or into the hospital unless they do not get better or if they get worse.

For more information, contact:

- Mental Health America at 800-969-6642, or visit their Web site at <http://www.nmha.org>
- the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill at 800-950-6264, or visit their Web site at <http://www.nami.org>