

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 25

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WHERE TO FIND HELP FOR YOUR CHILD

Parents are often concerned about their child's emotional health or behavior but they don't know where to start to get help. The mental health system can sometimes 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. They 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
- Local medical society, local psychiatric society
- Local mental health association
- County mental health department
- Local hospitals or medical centers with psychiatric services
- Department of Psychiatry in nearby medical school
- National Advocacy Organizations (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, National Mental Health Association)
- 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 herself or himself a "psychotherapist" or a "therapist."

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist — A child and adolescent psychiatrist is a licensed physician (M.D. or D.O.) who is a fully trained psychiatrist and who 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 become 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.

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Psychiatrist — A psychiatrist is 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 become 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 psychologists 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, developmental or research psychology. Psychologists are licensed by most states. Psychologists can also provide psychological evaluation and treatment for emotional and behavioral problems and disorders. Psychologists can also provide psychological testing and assessments.

Social Worker — Some social workers 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 different forms of psychotherapy.

Parents should try to find a mental health professional who has advanced training and experience with the evaluation and treatment of 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.

For additional information see *Facts for Families*:

#00 Definition of a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist;

#24 When to Seek Help;

#26 Understanding Your Mental Health Insurance; and

#52 Comprehensive Psychiatric Evaluations.

See also: *Your Child* (1998 Harper Collins)/*Your Adolescent* (199 Harper Collins).

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You may also mail in your contribution. Please make checks payable to the AACAP and send to **Campaign for America's Kids**, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, DC 20090.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 7,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

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