

Mental Health and Behavioral Health Services for My Child

Where Do I Begin?

When to Get Help

Parents are usually the first ones to be concerned about their child's behavior or emotions. Sometimes it is hard to know when to act on your concerns, or whether the behavior is just part of typical development. But when the challenges are causing disruption for your child and family over time and are getting in the way of age-appropriate activity, it may be time to seek help.

Some examples of behavior that may indicate your child needs help include; feeling sad or withdrawn for weeks at a time, severe mood swings, major changes in behavior or personality, extreme over-eating or dieting, not being able to sit still or pay attention, intense worries that get in the way of daily life, or any behavior that is harmful to themselves or others.

Where to Start

Don't be afraid or embarrassed to reach out and seek help for your child. *Did you know that one in five people struggle with mental illness and half of all mental illness starts by age 14?* With treatment and support, most children and teens can learn to cope with challenging behaviors, can develop close relationships and can gain the skills to lead successful lives. (NAMI - www.nami.org).

❖ **Talk to your Child's Doctor**

For most families, the first step is to make an appointment with your child's primary care doctor and talk about your concerns. Your child's doctor can help recognize behavior that is outside the typical range, and can make referrals for further diagnosis or evaluation. You may want to write down your thoughts and keep track of when you first noticed the concerning behavior, how often you see it and what seems to trigger that behavior.

❖ **Talk to Family-Support Agencies**

Connecting with family support organizations can be a critically important part of helping families on their journey. **Wisconsin Family Ties (WFT)** at **1-800-422-7145** is staffed by parents who have children with mental health challenges. They will talk to families about where to begin, how to find help and how to partner with your child's school. **NAMI Wisconsin** (namiwisconsin.org) at **1.800.236.2988** and **Mental Health America of WI** (www.mhawisconsin.org) at **1.866.948.6483** provide information and advocacy for families who have children with mental health concerns.

❖ **Talk to your Child's School**

Most schools have a social worker or school psychologist who can help you find resources and services. You can discuss services available during the school day and whether your child may qualify for special education services. To learn more about special education go to the DPI website- dpi.wi.gov and see [Special Education in Plain Language](#). To learn more about best practices in school mental health see [The WI School Mental Health Framework](#).

Getting A Professional Evaluation

Your child's doctor or school staff may suggest having your child evaluated by a mental health professional. As a parent or caregiver you can also request an assessment or evaluation. A mental health provider will likely complete the evaluation which may include an interview with your child and other family members, review of information from school or other providers and additional testing (for example a blood test or speech and language evaluation). To learn more go to

www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Comprehensive-Psychiatric-Evaluation-052.aspx

It is important that you contact your insurance company or health plan to find out which providers and evaluation services are covered under your Plan. *Need help finding a provider?* **Wisconsin First Step** can help you find providers or programs that conduct mental health assessments in your area.

After the Diagnosis

Sometimes the “not knowing” is worse than actually having a name for the condition. Many families feel less helpless and more hopeful once they have a diagnosis and can start to learn more about their child's condition. Below are a few online resources to start:

- ❖ **Finding Your Way** - A Navigation Guide for Wisconsin Families who Have A Child with Special Health Care Needs and Disabilities - www.waisman.wisc.edu/cedd/pdfs/products/community/FYW_e.pdf
- ❖ **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)** directory of mental health conditions and potential treatment- www.samhsa.gov/treatment/mental-disorders
- ❖ **NAMI** (National Alliance on Mental Illness) - www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment

Next Steps

Your child's doctor can partner with you to find the right treatment and services for your child and family. This may include medication, therapy, community programs and/or school-based supports and services. Informal supports (e.g., social skills classes or support groups) may also benefit your family. To learn about paying for services, treatment options and waiting for services and long term supports, visit the Family Voices of Wisconsin website (www.familyvoicesofwisconsin.com) under **FV Fact sheets**.

Remember that while your journey of having a child with special needs may not be easy, there are many organizations and individuals who can help make the path easier!

If you have questions or need help finding services contact the following organizations:

- **Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs** is a network of 5 centers dedicated to supporting families who have children with special needs - dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/regionalcenters.htm
- **Wisconsin First Step**, a statewide information and referral hotline, can assist families with finding mental health providers and other supports at **1-800-642-STEP (7837)** or www.mch-hotlines.org/wisconsin-first-step
- **Wisconsin Family Ties** provides support and assistance to families who have children with mental health or behavioral health challenges. They can be reached at **1-800-422-7145**.