## **Good to Know**

# Talking to Your Child's Doctor About Behavior or Mental Health Issues

When we take our child or youth to the doctor it is usually a busy few moments and we often feel like we must hurry and cram in as much as possible. In addition, discussing mental, emotional, or behavior problems might be difficult. These two challenges can interfere with your child or youth getting the help they might need.

\*\*\*NOTE: If your child or youth, at ANY time, expresses a desire to die, be dead, or "leave this place" make an appointment quickly for an immediate evaluation. If your child's doctor is unable to see them immediately, take them to an emergency room, a crisis center, or other mental health facility. Consider this an emergency. It is better to be safe and learn that their behavior is normal than to miss a sign that they

## How to Make the Best of an Appointment

If you prepare ahead of time you will be able to take advantage of every minute of your appointment. This preparation starts when you call to make an appointment.

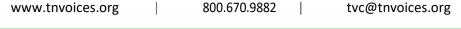
## Making Your Appointment

Before you make the appointment, think about how critical it is for your child or youth to see a doctor immediately compared to an issue that can wait for a week or two. Keep in mind that going through your child's doctor can cut long wait times for appointments with mental health programs and providers.

If you are noticing a pattern of behavior that has been going on for several weeks or more and is of concern, you can likely wait a week or two for the appointment.

But, if you are seeing any of these, you need to request and push for an immediate appointment as soon as possible.

- You have noticed a sudden and drastic change in your child or youth. This might include excessive sleeping that is not related to an illness, constant crying, out of control anger in a child that is generally easy going and calm, or possibly very dangerous behavior and risk taking.
- The school is threatening to suspend or expel your child or youth for their behavior at school.
- There has been a difficult or traumatic event (such as a close relative or friend's death, the loss of a pet, or a relationship break up) and they seem to be having trouble expressing them selves or cannot seem to get over the event.





## **Making Your Appointment (continued...)**

When you call, tell them you are calling to discuss some mental health issues with the doctor, what the behavior is, and why you feel it is critical. For example:

"Hi. This is Sandy Smith and I need to make an appointment for my son Sam Smith to see the doctor as soon as possible. He recently lost a close friend and he is not eating, sleeps all day, and does not enjoy activities that used to make him happy. The school is also reporting concerns with his behavior. I believe we need to be considered urgent because of the sudden changes and the impact on his home and school life. Can you see him right away or can you refer us to an appropriate facility for an evaluation?"

Be persistent if you are concerned. Do not let someone who has not seen your child decide if it is urgent or not.

## Prior to the Appointment



Before the appointment discuss with your child or youth why this is important. Help them see that their brain is as important as their stomach or heart. Tell them you are glad that you have a doctor (or other professional) that can help them understand what is happening in their brain. Let them know you are not doing this because they are "bad" or because you are tired of their behavior. You might ask them to write you and the doctor a letter about how they are feeling.

Before the appointment have the following ready:

- A written list of your concerns and observations so you are not rushed and forget important points.
- Any communications from the school.
- Anything else you think that would help, such a letter as discussed above.

### At the appointment:

- Present them with your written concerns, school communications, and letter if possible or necessary.
- Listen closely to their questions and assist your child or youth in answering them.
- Do NOT speak for your child or youth. Let them answer first and then you can add your observations. If they say nothing, ask them the question again. If they still do not answer, you answer if possible. Your child or youth may be embarrassed, afraid, or might be worried they will cry or show emotion.

# General Questions You Might Ask ☐ What do you think is upsetting him/her? ☐ What do you recommend we do? ☐ Can you help us identify additional help?

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# If the Doctor recommends mental health services...

- What types of changes in my child, youth, or family can expect as a result of this treatment?
- Where will my child or youth receive this treatment?

How often and for how long will the treatment be necessary?

- ☐ How much will this treatment cost?
- Will my health insurance plan pay for the treatment?
- What other treatment options are available?
- ☐ Is this the least restrictive option for my child or youth?
- ☐ What will your role be in the treatment and developing the treatment plan?
- ☐ How often can we visit, phone, or contact our child or youth? (for inpatient services)
- ☐ What would be the next step after this treatment is completed?
- ☐ Can you put me in touch with another family that has used this particular treatment, program or facility?



# If the doctor recommends medication...

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	What is the name of the medication?
	Is it called by any other name(s)?
	What is it usedfor?
	Is it used for anything other than what it is being
	used for in my child or youth?
	Are there other medications you could use
	instead?
	Why did you recommend this medication?
	What side effects can be expected?
	Are there side effects that can affect my child's or
	youth's school performance?
	What side effects should I call about
	immediately, and what side effects can wait until
	your office is open?
	Are there other medications or foods my child or
	youth should avoid while taking this medication?
	Are there any activities my child or youth should
	avoid while taking this medication?
	How long (days? weeks?) do you feel my child or
	youth may need this medication?
	How will we know if the medication is working?
	How long (days? weeks?) might that take before
	the medication starts towork?
	Will any tests or other blood work be done while
	using this medication?
	How often and where would these tests be done?
	When and how should I give the medication?
	What happens if we miss a dose?
	Can my child or youth become addicted to this
	medication?
	Do you have any written information on this
	drug?
	What is the cost of the medication?
	Is there a less expensive, generic version of this
	medication?
	Does the generic work as well as the brand name
	version of this medication?
	How will this be written into my child's or youth's
	treatment plan and shared with others on the
	care team, including those at school?

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