

Answers to Your Questions About **GETTING HELP** For Children with Mental Health Concerns

Where do I start if I think my child is having difficulties?

A good place to begin is with your child's doctor. Many physical illnesses can mimic the symptoms of mental illness. A physical exam can help to rule out certain illnesses. Children who have brain disorders can be very difficult to diagnose because often the symptoms of the disorder in children are different from the symptoms experienced by adults. It is important that your child receive an accurate diagnosis, especially before considering medication.

You can help your child's doctor or specialist arrive at the right diagnosis by writing down:

- Things your child has difficulty with
- The times of the day that your child is affected the most
- Settings that are the most difficult
- Events or circumstances that led up to your child experiencing difficulty
- Things you have done when your child is having difficulty

Ask your school about psycho-educational testing to rule out any learning disability. There are also private agencies that provide psycho-educational testing. Check the Learning Disabilities website at www.ldav.ca/referrals.html for more information.

My child seems to need a lot of blood tests, is there any way to make this easier for him or her?

Getting a needle is not a fun experience for children. Ask the lab technician to use a butterfly needle on your child, as it seems to cause less discomfort for children. Also, there are creams available now that are applied to the skin that freezes the area and results in less discomfort when the blood is taken.

Where should parents look when searching for a mental health professional?

Mental health therapists and clinicians are available by contacting your local office of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Ask for the mental health intake worker. A listing of community offices can be found online at www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/pdf/services.pdf. Anyone can make this call—young people themselves, parents, guardians or others directly involved in the child's life. In addition to government services, families can also check the BC Psychological Association website for listings of registered psychologists at www.psychologists.bc.ca. These are user-pay services and may be covered by your extended health plan.

What can I do while I'm waiting to see a specialist?

Educate yourself. Search the library or Internet for information on child and youth mental health to gain as much information as possible. There are some good tips from books like *The Explosive Child* by Dr. Ross Greene. Parents have indicated that his practical advice really helped them to learn how to minimize their children's emotional explosions. In addition, look for family support agencies such as the F.O.R.C.E. Society for Kids' Mental Health that may be able to assist in answering any questions you may have and locating support groups for parents.

What are some things my child's school can do to help while I am sorting out testing, services, etc. for my child?

You could request to have a meeting with your child's teacher(s) and other relevant school personnel to look at alterations that can be made to accommodate the difficult times that you are experiencing. These may include less or no homework, altered start and finish times for school, an alternate room or place your child can go if they are experiencing problems, and more breaks from work.



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Where do I start seeking help for my child at school?

Contact your school's principal or your child's teacher and ask for the name and contact information of the counselor that services your school. Also, many school districts now have a school mental health liaison worker. Call the Student Support Services office in your school district to ask about these workers.

What does it mean if my child receives a special needs designation from the Ministry of Education?

A designation code means that a child is recognized as having special needs and entitles your child to extra funding and an Individual Education Plan to meet his or her unique needs at school.

What if my child needs to be hospitalized or requires more extensive intervention?

BC Children's Hospital is the only facility that offers in-patient psychiatric care for children under 12. Regional hospitals offer various youth psychiatric services. The Ministry of Children & Family Development, in partnership with some local school districts and Health Regions, offer day treatment programs. Check with your local Student Support Services office for availability and contact information, as a referral is needed to these programs.

How do I apply for a disability tax credit for my child?

The Disability Tax Credit is available to those who have an impairment in physical or mental functions that is severe and prolonged. There is a government form that your physician must complete for filing with your taxes. For more information, please visit www.cra-arc.gc.ca/benefits/disability-e.html.

What can I do if I don't seem to be getting anywhere?

Often it helps to bring together key people who can help put a care plan together and ensure all pieces come together. Here are some of the people who can help.

- Social worker—can assist in coordinating other services like in-home support
- Mental health clinician/therapist
- Community team leader for mental health
- Child/youth care worker
- Student support services
- Community services manager
- Teachers
- Advocate

Make a list or have someone help you to identify what your needs are before requesting a meeting.

The F.O.R.C.E.

Families Organized for Recognition and Care Equality
Society for Kid's Mental Health

