

Family physicians can play an important role in getting help needed when a child is exhibiting behaviours that are unusual and may be symptoms of a mental health problem.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM Your Family Physician in Children's Mental Health

The family physician is usually:

- ✿ The medical professional that families are most familiar with.
- ✿ The starting point when families suspect there may be a problem with their child.
- ✿ A professional who has the knowledge and resources to help rule out other medical conditions that sometimes can cause certain behaviours or symptoms.
- ✿ The professional who can refer you to other specialized services such as a paediatrician or psychiatrist.
- ✿ Able to provide you, the parent, with resources and support.
- ✿ One person of many who will probably be needed to fully assist and support your child and your family.

Your family physician will probably ask you about:

- ✿ Changes you have observed in your child (i.e., What are the changes or behaviours that concern you? When do these behaviors occur, how long do they last? What are the conditions in which the behaviors most often occur?).
- ✿ What you have done to try and help resolve the problem.
- ✿ Settings or activities that are most challenging for your child.
- ✿ Family physical and mental health history.
- ✿ Whether your child is having any problems at school.
- ✿ Whether there have been any recent changes in your family situation (e.g., death in the family, divorce).
- ✿ Whether your child has sexual knowledge or body-talk that is unusual for a child his or her age.

When To See Your Family Physician

A parent will often see their family doctor when they suspect something doesn't seem right like:

- ✿ The child is exhibiting behaviours that are unusual, disruptive, or that prevent them from participating in situations that are typical for their age.
- ✿ The child no longer seems to enjoy or participate in things they once did.
- ✿ The child's school has noticed increased difficulties that they can't explain.



MORE ON WHAT TO EXPECT >

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Your family physician may:

- ✿ Want to perform a physical examination and order some diagnostic tests (e.g., blood tests). He or she may invite you to stay with the child for physical exam, if your child would be more comfortable.
- ✿ Ask you to keep a log of the behaviours and schedule another visit if they feel there isn't enough time in one visit to diagnose the problem.
- ✿ Feel that additional evaluation is necessary to accurately diagnose and make appropriate recommendations for treatment.
- ✿ Refer you to Child and Youth Mental Health Services, who may be able to offer additional help for your child.
- ✿ Continue to act as a resource for you and your child.
- ✿ Also work with other professionals who are involved in your child's care and, in some cases, prescribe and monitor the ongoing use of medication.
- ✿ Recommend that you get immediate help (i.e., take your child to emergency), or through the urgent assessment clinic at BC Children's Hospital, if he or she believes your child is a danger to himself/herself or others.

It may assist your family physician if you can provide:

- ✿ Some samples of your child's school report cards.
- ✿ Information on possible sources of help that you have already researched.
- ✿ Permission to speak with your child's teacher, school counsellor or other agencies and supports that are involved in your child's life (NOTE: You can ask to be present when information is shared and to limit what can be shared with other professionals).
- ✿ Results from any assessments or psychological testing your child has received.

How You Can Help Prepare Your Child

You can meet the needs of your child by encouraging them to participate and provide input at the appointment with your family physician. Let your child know:

- ✿ You will be discussing your concerns with the doctor.
- ✿ That he/she can correct you if you are saying something that doesn't match how they feel.
- ✿ They can add their own impressions of how they are feeling.
- ✿ The doctor may want to speak to them alone, just to ask a few other questions, and that it's safe and okay to tell the doctor about absolutely anything.
- ✿ It may also be necessary for the parent to speak to the doctor alone.

The F.O.R.C.E.

Families Organized for Recognition and Care Equality
Society for Kids' Mental Health

