

MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

DOES MY CHILD NEED HELP?

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
FEBRUARY 2023- MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT

We all worry about our children. Sometimes our worries are about whether they are developing in a healthy way or about whether they are happy. We do not like to see them sad or suffering. Sometimes we worry because a child's behavior is causing problems for them, or for the whole family. One of the challenges of parenting is knowing when a worry requires action.

How do you know when to get help for a child who is struggling? You need to keep in mind that children develop at different rates and there is a broad range of behavior that is typical and healthy as children grow up.

Here are some things to consider in deciding whether a child needs professional help.

- 1. What are the behaviors that are worrying you?** To evaluate your situation clearly, it is important to observe and write specifically the things you are concerned about. Try to avoid general statements like "He is acting up all the time!" or "She's uncooperative." Think about specific behaviors, like "His teacher complains that he cannot wait his turn to speak," or "She gets upset when asked to stop one activity and start another."
- 2. How often does it happen?** If your child seems sad or hopeless, is that occurring once a week, or most of the time? If they are having tantrums, when do they occur? How long do they last? Since many problem behaviors such as fears, impulsiveness, irritability, and defiance are behaviors that all children occasionally exhibit, frequency, duration, and intensity are often key to identifying a disorder.
- 3. Are these behaviors outside the typical range for their age?** Children and teenagers exhibit a wide range of behaviors. It may be helpful to share what you are seeing with a professional who sees a lot of children such as a teacher, or pediatrician to get a view on whether your child's behaviors fall outside of the typical range for their age group.
- 4. How long has this been going on?** Challenging behavior that has been happening for a few days or even a few weeks may be a response to a stressful event and could improve over time. Part of diagnosing a child is ruling out things that are short-term responses, and probably do not require intervention.
- 5. How much are they interfering with their life?** Perhaps the biggest factor of whether your child needs help is whether their symptoms and behaviors are getting in the way of them doing age-appropriate things at home, at school and in the community.

If you have determined that your child's behaviors, thoughts, or emotions might call for attention, your next move is to consult a professional.

Where do you start? For most parents, contacting and talking to your family doctor is the first step. Your family doctor already knows you and your child and can recognize when behavior is outside typical range. They can also do medical testing to rule out possible physical health causes for the troubling symptoms. Ask for a referral or seek out another clinician if you are not comfortable with what your doctor offers.

Excepted from:

[Parents Guide to Good Care](#) | [Learning Disorders](#) | [Child Mind Institute](#)