

MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD WHILE WAITING TO START THERAPY

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

Sometimes there are waiting lists for mental health treatment, particularly if there is an increase in demand for mental health services.

Reaching out to seek mental health care takes courage and the first step can be more difficult due to the stigma associated with mental health. Waiting to start mental health therapy while your child is experiencing difficulties can be stressful for the whole family and the child. Check in regularly to see how your child is feeling and ask them how you can help.

It is important to be mindful that you can show your support and care through continued conversation with your child.

Below are some tips on how to support your child while waiting for services to begin:

Ways to be Supportive While Waiting for Your Child to Start Therapy:

1. **Connect with others.** Think about who you want to share this personal information with. Who are the people that can help support your child and your family during this challenging time? If you have older children, you may want to include them on this decision.
2. **Set routines and structures.** While you wait, your family may be feeling a high level of stress and emotions. Maintaining routines and schedules can help the whole family to know what to expect, which can lead to us feeling more in control and less stressed.
3. **Try new coping skills.** You do not have to wait for therapy to start to try new things that may improve your child's mental health. Encourage your child to open-up and talk with you about anything that interests them. Try new activities to help them relax and feel calm. Brainstorm about a project they can work on individually and/or you can work on together.
4. **Take care of yourself.** You cannot help your child if you are not doing well yourself. Find time each day to do something for yourself, even if only for just a few minutes. Do not be afraid to reach out to your family and friends and social network for support, when you need it.
5. **Take time to prepare your child.** If your child has never visited a therapist, tell them what to expect. They will likely sit down with a therapist who will also be seated. Most of the time a parent, guardian or caregiver will go in with the child for the first meeting.
6. **Answer your child's questions.** Your child may want to know basic information about therapy that you can explain. Try to put your child's mind at ease about meeting with the therapist by assuring your child that the therapist will ask questions because they are there to help.
7. **Validate uncertainties and emotions.** There will be a lot of unknowns before starting therapy and doing new things can be scary, especially for a child. Reassure your child that therapy is not something that they can do wrong. Remind your child that it is perfectly normal to feel a little nervous the first few times, but you will get through it together.