



Early Learning Digest

Research-based early childhood development information provided by Lifetrack

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Diagnosing Mental Illness in Children

Mental illness in children can be hard for parents to identify. If you're concerned about your child's mental health, seek advice from an expert. Warning signs that your child might have a mental health condition include:

- **Mood changes.** Look for withdrawal and feelings of sadness that last at least two weeks or severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships at home, preschool or daycare.
- **Intense feelings.** Indications are racing heart or fast breathing accompanied by a feeling of overwhelming fear for no reason. These feelings interfere with daily activities.
- **Behavior changes.** These are changes in behavior or personality such as frequent fighting or dangerous behavior with threats to hurt others.
- **Difficulty concentrating.** Watch for difficulty focusing or sitting still which can lead to poor performance in school.



- **Unexplained weight loss.** This could be a sudden loss of appetite or frequent vomiting.

Diagnosing mental illness in children can be difficult because normal development varies from child to child. Children often have trouble expressing their feelings. A proper diagnosis is an essential part of guiding treatment. With support, you can find out whether your child has a mental health condition and explore treatment options so your child can thrive.

Source: "Mental illness in children: Know the signs," retrieved from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/childrens-health/in-depth/mental-illness-in-children/art-20046577>.

Kids and Medicine

Getting children to take medicine can be a challenge. However, there are a few things you can do to help the process.

Use words and tones to encourage your child to take his medicine. Explain how medicine will help him get well. You could explain it by simply saying, "This medicine will help you feel better so you can go back to the playground."

Give medications at the same time and place. It helps to create a designated spot in your house for giving medicine and to create a routine. To stay on schedule, put a checklist on the refrigerator or your child's door. With every dose of medication, have your child make a check or put a sticker on the list.

Offer choices or a distraction whenever you can. Taking medicine is non-negotiable, but other things are. Even the simplest choices give the child a needed sense of control over the situation and over his body. Offer two simple choices, such as, "Do you want the medicine before you get dressed or after?" or, "Would you like apple, orange or grape juice with your medicine?" Provide a toy or book to distract your child from the process.

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If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or call 1-866-693-GROW (4769), to talk to a professional and find out how you can get connected with various resources in Minnesota.

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Explain the consequences. If a child refuses to take medicine, explain that he is making a choice that has consequences. You could say, "I see you're choosing to stay in the house and not go outside and play until you take this medicine."

If your child still resists, give him an "out." Before you take away a privilege, try giving your child an "out" or suggest taking a short break. This allows him to save face and regroup, physically and emotionally.

Let another adult take over. For kids who are truly resistant, parents might divide the responsibility of who gives the medicine. This gives one parent a necessary break and helps the child realize that both parents are capable of handling this and that it's important.

Source: "Talking with Kids About Health," http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/health/medicine_1.html.

Test your knowledge on mental illness in children...

1. T F Difficulty focusing or sitting still is not a warning sign of mental illness in children.
2. T F Proper diagnosis of mental illness is an essential part of guiding treatment.
3. T F Diagnosing mental illness in children can be difficult because normal development varies from child to child.

Answers: 1) F, 2) T, 3) T

Sun Protection



Just a few serious sunburns can increase your child's risk of skin cancer later in life. Kids don't have to be at the pool, beach, or on vacation to get too much sun. Their skin needs protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays whenever they're outdoors.

- **Seek shade.** UV rays are strongest and most harmful during midday, so it's best to plan indoor activities then. If this is not possible, seek shade under a tree, an umbrella, or a pop-up tent.
- **Cover up.** Clothing that covers your child's skin helps protect against UV rays.
- **Get a hat.** Hats that shade the face, scalp, ears, and neck are easy to use and give great protection.
- **Wear sunglasses.** They protect your child's eyes from UV rays, which can lead to cataracts later in life. Look for sunglasses that

wrap around and block as close to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays as possible.

- **Apply sunscreen.** Use sunscreen with at least SPF 15 and UVA and UVB protection every time your child goes outside. For the best protection, apply sunscreen generously 30 minutes before going outdoors. Don't forget to protect ears, noses, lips, and the tops of feet. Take sunscreen with you to reapply during the day, especially after your child swims or exercises. This applies to water proof and water-resistant products as well.
- **Follow the directions** on the package for using a sunscreen product on babies less than 6 months old. All products do not have the same ingredients; if your child's skin reacts badly to one product, try another one or call a doctor. Your baby's best defense against sunburn is avoiding the sun or staying in the shade.

Keep in mind, sunscreen is not meant to allow kids to spend more time in the sun than they would otherwise. Try combining sunscreen with other options to prevent UV damage.

Source: "How Can I Protect My Children From the Sun?" Center for Disease Control, http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/children.htm.

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