

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT WORRISOME BEHAVIOR

1. **What should I do if I am concerned about mental, behavioral or emotional symptoms in my young child?**

Talk to your child's doctor. Ask questions and find out everything you can about the behavior or symptoms that worry you. Sensory processing, language, and motor skills are developing during early childhood along with the ability to relate to parents and to socialize with caregivers and other children. Keep in mind that every child is different and even normal development varies from child to child. Ask the caregiver or teacher if your child has been showing any worrisome changes in behavior. If so, discuss these with the doctor as well.

2. **How do I know if my child's problems are serious?**

Everyday stresses can cause worrisome changes in behavior. For example, the birth of a sibling may cause a temporary change. It may be difficult to tell the difference between these kinds of changes and more serious problems.

It is a good idea to seek professional help when problems are severe, persistent, and impact daily activities.

Seek help for your child if you notice, in the absence of a reasonable cause:

- changes in appetite or sleep
- social withdrawal or fearfulness
- slipping back to earlier behavior like bed-wetting
- signs of distress such as sadness or tearfulness
- self destructive behavior such as head banging
- a tendency to have frequent injuries

Be prepared to review the development of your child, any important medical problem, family history of mental disorders and mental or physical traumas or situations that may cause stress.

3. **How are mental disorders diagnosed in young children?**

As in adults, disorders are diagnosed by observing signs and symptoms. A skilled professional will review these signs and symptoms in the context of the child's developmental level and social and physical environment according to criteria established by experts. Reports from parents and other caretakers or teachers will be carefully considered. The signs of a mental disorder in a young child may be quite different from those of an older child or an adult.

4. **Can my child get better over time?**

Yes! As the brain develops and the child matures, the child may be better able to cope with symptoms and learn to control behaviors without continued need for professional intervention. Some children will need medications and supportive treatment for a longer period of time, even into adulthood. However, with the newer range of medications that are effective for teens and adults and the availability of supportive interventions, children and adults can have productive lives in their communities in spite of mental illness.

5. **Does my child have to be hospitalized in order to be treated?**

Not necessarily! Most treatment for children's mental disorders takes the form of outpatient services in the community. Occasionally, when symptoms are severe and behavior is completely out of control, a child may need to be hospitalized to stabilize both medication and behavior. The period of hospitalization is usually short term.