

ACCESSING AND ASSESSING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS

There are many different types of behavioral health professionals and many different approaches to therapy. To increase the likelihood of success, we need to intentionally match the specific needs of the student to the service provider's qualifications and expertise. A critical step is to work with the parent to identify the student's specific needs and preferences. Ideally, the school will have a list of providers and have identified their qualifications, areas of expertise and personal factors to assist in making a good match.

Prior to committing to a service, the student and their parents should be knowledgeable of the provider's credentials and feel comfortable working with the provider. The school may wish to focus questions in the following areas to develop a data base of providers and/or the student and their caregiver may wish to ask prior to committing to the service:

- **Educational Background:** In what discipline is their degree – clinical or counseling psychology, social work, marriage and family, psychiatry. What is the highest degree they have achieved – bachelors, masters, doctorate, medical doctor – psychiatrist, board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist.
- **Population of focus:** Children are not little adults; the provider should be trained and have extensive experience in working with the age population of the students. The provider should be knowledgeable of typical childhood development and the interaction with mental health issues. The provider should have familiarity in working with different child-focused systems such as schools, child welfare, and juvenile justice.
- **Types of Interventions:** The research on what is effective to address specific behavioral health issues is growing and there are many evidence-based practices (EBP) that can be utilized. Have the provider tell you on what EBP's they have been trained and certified/rostered. Simply having practiced for years with a certain population does not mean they have the specific knowledge to treat a topic. To understand or view a list of evidenced based practices for students there are several websites you can visit including:
 - National Institute for Health - <https://prevention.nih.gov/resources-for...and.../evidence-based-programs-practices>
 - California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare - <http://www.cebc4cw.org/>
 - National Registry for Evidence Based Practices and Programs - <https://nrepp.samhsa.gov/landing.aspx>
 - National Child Traumatic Stress Network - <http://nctsn.org/training-guidelines>
 - There are a number of registries that you can review to find a provider or to determine if they are certified/rostered for a trauma specific practice
 - MoACTS <https://www.moacts.org/Roster.aspx>
 - Dialectical Behavior Therapy MO http://www.dbtmo.org/dbtmo1.0/Resource/Re_ClinicalDirectory.aspx
 - DBT Linehan Board of Certification - <https://dbt-lbc.org/index.php?page=101163>
 - EMDR Institute - <http://www.emdr.com/SEARCH/index.php>

Choosing a Behavioral Health Provider

- **Treatment Modalities:** What type of treatment modalities do they offer...school-based, office, home-based, individual, group or family therapies. Specifically ask about how they include the family. The younger the child the more critical it is for the primary caregiver(s) to be involved in therapy or even the focus of the intervention to address relational and environmental factors.
- **Information Sharing:** With appropriate consent by the legal guardian are they willing to work closely with other organizations or people who are supporting the child such as school, Children's Division, Juvenile Office, primary care doctor, prescriber of medications, community providers, and adjunct therapy providers.

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- **Adjunctive Therapies:** There are many sensory and somatic interventions that can also be utilized to address behavioral health issues. These may include but not be limited to:
 - Occupational Therapists
 - Art Therapists
 - Music Therapists
 - Yoga
 - Acupuncture
 - Biofeedback

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When seeking help for your child, you will want to try to find a mental health provider who meets these requirements:

- Has experience in helping families overcome traumatic stress
- Offers services near your home or is easy for you to get to
- Uses evidence-based practices (EBP), that is, treatments proven to help all members of the family:
 - Feel safe
 - Learn about trauma and its effects
 - Cope with difficulties caused by the trauma
 - Recognize and build on the family and family members' strengths
 - Talk about ways to get the family back on track

How do I choose a therapist or counselor who's right for my family?

There are many types of mental health providers, including psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, and licensed counselors. Psychiatrists can prescribe medications because they are physicians. Mental health professionals who are not physicians can provide therapy and often work with psychiatrists and family physicians to ensure that their patients can receive any needed medications. Psychologists are skilled in evaluation and in various forms of intelligence, personality, and psychological testing. What's important is that you select a provider with appropriate training and qualifications. Once you have the name or names of several mental health professionals in your area, call and interview them over the phone to determine which is the best match for you and your family.

What can my family expect from therapy?

There are many approaches to outpatient psychotherapy, which may occur in individual, group, or family sessions. Treatment for your child may involve the following:

- Talking with your child or having him or her draw or play with toys in order to get a better understanding of what he or she is experiencing, feeling, or thinking
- Asking about your child's experience of the traumatic event, and other areas in his or her life, such as how the child is getting along with family, friends, teachers, and other students in school
- Assessing your child's strengths, skills, and talents, as well as problems
- Engaging with your child (while taking into account age and emotional maturity) to try to understand the traumatic experience, including the ways it has affected daily life
- Teaching a variety of evidence-based treatment techniques such as relaxation methods and problem-solving skills, and including, in some cases, interventions with the school and family or referral for medication

The goal of treatment is to help your child to address feelings of helplessness and worries over safety and to identify helpful thoughts and actions. Because trauma can interrupt a child's normal development, therapy helps in reducing the symptoms of child traumatic stress, as well as offering your child support and guidance to return to age-appropriate activities. Your child's therapist will probably ask for your participation and cooperation, because these are extremely important to the recovery of your children and the well-being of your family.

Many effective treatments include cognitive behavioral principles:

- Education about the impact of trauma

Choosing a Behavioral Health Provider

- Helping children and their parents establish or reestablish a sense of safety
- Techniques for dealing with overwhelming emotional reactions
- An opportunity to talk about the traumatic experience in a safe, accepting environment
- Involvement, when possible, of primary caregivers in the healing process