

What to Expect From Community Child & Youth Mental Health Services

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (www.gov.on.ca/mcys) funds a range of mental health services for children, youth and their families. These programs are delivered through independent agencies and can include assessment, treatment, and education services.

There is great demand for these services so there could be a waiting period before you get an appointment. Most agencies that deliver these services are members of Children's Mental Health Ontario, and are accredited by them. You can find a list of accredited¹ member agencies at www.kidsmentalhealth.ca. In some communities, all referrals to children's mental health services are made through a central intake service.

When you contact a child and youth mental health service:

You will speak with an intake worker who will talk to you about your concerns. They will ask you questions that help them to assess the number and severity of your child's problems. You will most likely be asked to participate in a brief child and family phone interview. This takes 15-20 minutes, and is a basic screening tool used to help determine what is needed.

The highest priority is given to those who are suicidal or whose functioning is badly affected due to acute mental illness. Accredited agencies must provide or help you to find immediate services if you are in a crisis or emergency situation. You may be advised to go to your local hospital if your child is in immediate danger of hurting themselves or others.

The intake worker may direct you to other community resources if they feel your child's problem may be better helped through those resources. They may also give you information about walk-in clinics, groups, supports or resources (films, books) that could help you during the wait. If they don't, you can ask for this information. Accredited agencies must inform everyone who calls how to get help in a crisis or emergency situation.

While on the wait list, you should update the agency whenever your child or youth's situation changes. You may also call for an update on when you may be seen.

Provided to you by:

What happens when you go to the children's mental health centre?

Your first few appointments will determine what you would like help with. To assess the situation, the clinician or team will use conversations with you and your child, observation, play and/or testing. The assessment process should recognize and accommodate your unique circumstances such as your culture, religion, language and ethnicity. The agency will then tell you how they view your situation and how they propose to help you and your child. You will have the chance to ask questions and get clarification, and you must be told about the risks and benefits of the treatment options under consideration.

The process should try to identify both your child's difficulties and strengths. There should be a discussion of what your goals and responsibilities are. Then you can use the goals to see if there is any progress over time as your child is treated.

Child and youth mental health professionals may ask for your permission to see school or medical records. They might also want to talk with your child's school or family doctor. This is important. Along with your reports and what your child says, they need to hear about your child's behaviour in different settings. Then, with this information, they have a complete assessment and can propose the best plan of action for your child and family.

You should receive information on the assessment and recommended individualized treatment plan. Accredited agencies are expected to negotiate and share decision-making with you about the treatment plan, including the goals, time-frames and methods to be used. If your child is over the age of 12 years, they can receive services without your involvement.

What you can expect from your child or youth's therapy or treatment

Treatment may involve the use of therapy, a combination of medication and therapy or just medications. Your child may be involved in family, individual or group sessions at an agency or office setting, or services may be provided in your home, your child's school or another community setting. Medications may be prescribed and monitored by your family doctor or a psychiatrist. A social worker, child and youth counsellor, child and youth worker or psychologist usually provides therapies, and in many situations a team of different professionals will work together with you and your child. If you are unsure who someone is, or what their role is in your child's treatment, ask them to explain.

The clinician will likely need to work with others involved in your child's care. These people may include your child's teacher, school counsellor or others in student support services in your school board. When everyone is on the same page, it is easier for them to work together to accomplish the goals.

Therapies or interventions can help your child learn skills that can help them throughout life. Some therapies are backed by research that shows they work, and some are not. You can ask your clinical team what the evidence is for the treatment they are recommending for your child.

In therapy, your child may learn about why they are having problems and how they can deal with them. The solutions may involve learning to:

- Identify situations that can make their symptoms worse
- Change negative thinking patterns
- Use healthy problem-solving and coping skills
- Distinguish between different emotions
- Use more appropriate ways of expressing their feelings
- Use other new skills that can either prevent symptoms or help your child cope with them.

You will probably be asked to:

- Support and encourage your child or youth to participate in treatment
- Participate in treatment sessions, particularly if your child is young. Older adolescents and teens generally come for their sessions alone
- Stay at the office if your child is receiving therapy there
- Help with homework assignments to practice newly learned skills at home

You may also be referred by child and youth mental health services to:

- A day-treatment program that combines therapy, school and life-skill building
- A residential treatment program in a community setting that provides therapy and skill building
- A hospital in-patient unit where extensive assessment and observation can take place
- Other community programs that offer specialized mental health support and education to children, youth and their families

You do not have to:

- Accept the recommended treatment – child and youth mental health services will still see your child
- Give permission for any reports to be shared with other professionals. You should expect that reports will only be shared with other professionals once you have read, understand, and agreed to share them.

1. Accreditation is a process that requires agencies to meet challenging standards that define high quality services. It involves an extensive internal and external review at set intervals. For more information on Children's Mental Health Ontario accreditation see: http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/become_member/accreditation_faqs.php



www.CYMHIN.ca

This document has been developed based on a similar document from **The FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health**, a BC parent-led advocacy and support organization. We wish to thank them for their ideas and inspiration, however any errors are the responsibility of the Child and Youth Mental Health Information Network (CYMHIN). CYMHIN is a collaboration between mental health organizations dedicated to developing and sharing high quality information about child and youth mental health problems for children, youth and their families.

CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

YOU ARE FREE:



to Share - to copy, distribute and transmit the work

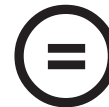
UNDER THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:



Attribution. You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).



Noncommercial. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.



No Derivative Works. You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.