# Children's Mental and Behavioral Health: Treatment and Support Services

**Below is a list of types of treatments and support services that may help a child with mental or behavioral health diagnoses. A combination (mix) of treatments usually works best. Work with the child's health care provider to make a plan that will match the child's needs. And remember, it's completely normal for it to take some time and trial and error to find the right fit!**

## Types of treatment



### Applied behavior analysis (ABA) [1]

ABA is a research-based behavior therapy. It is for people with autism and other developmental disorders. It uses positive reinforcement to build up everyday skills and gently discourage behaviors that might hold the person back.

### Crisis services [2]

A mental health crisis is a situation where the child is at risk of harming themselves or others, or their emotions and behavior seem extreme. The following are actions that can be taken if a child is having a mental health crisis:

- **In life-threatening situations, call 911 or go to the closest emergency room.**
- If there is no immediate danger:
  - Contact the following, free, 24-hour services:
    - Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, call or text 988
    - County Crisis Lines
  - Contact the child's mental health provider if they are currently receiving treatment. If they are not currently getting treatment contact their primary care provider.

### Medication management [3, 4]

Medication management can be a part of psychiatric care. Medication can help manage symptoms of mental illness and improve daily living. It may take some time to find the right medication and amount for the child's needs.

**It is important for the child to take the prescribed amount of a medication.**
**Dosage changes need to be discussed with the child's pediatrician (medical provider).**

## Psychiatric care [4, 5]

Psychiatric care focuses on diagnosing and treating mental health problems. Psychiatric care includes assessments, counseling, medication management, and more.

There are different levels of psychiatric care depending on the child's needs. They are listed below:

- Inpatient hospitalization
- Residential treatment
- Partial hospitalization program (PHP)
- Intensive outpatient program (IOP)
- Outpatient Therapy

## Psychotherapy and counseling [6, 7]

Psychotherapy and counseling are talk therapy. Usually, counseling is short-term while psychotherapy is long-term. Talk therapy looks at a child's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to try and fix problems or treat mental health conditions. This therapy is done with a mental health professional.

There are many types of talk therapy. The type a child receives depends on their situation. Some of the more common types of talk therapy are listed below:

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**
  - CBT helps change problematic and harmful thought and behavioral patterns. This is usually the first type of therapy used for most mental health conditions.
- **Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT)**
  - DBT teaches a child how to live in the moment and deal with stress in a healthy way. It can also help them control emotions and improve their relationships with others.
- **Exposure therapy**
  - Exposure therapy is where a child will face the thing or place that causes anxiety or fear. This exposure is spaced out and is done slowly. This is done in a controlled environment - without any actual danger. The goal is to build resilience and coping strategies.
- **School counseling**
  - School counseling allows a child to talk with a trusted neutral person. This counseling is best for everyday challenges and school-related issues.

## Residential treatment [8]

Residential treatment is 24/7 care in a live-in setting outside of the child's home. This type of care is for children who have repeated behaviors that are hard to manage and that cause safety concerns. The facilities that provide this treatment are secure and have restricted access to help keep the child safe.



Treatment can include:

- Individual and group therapies
- Family therapy
- Academics
- Structured schedules

The goal of this treatment is to have the children return home and be with their families.

# Types of support services

## Alternative or complementary therapy [9, 10, 11]

Alternative and complementary therapies are therapies that can be used along with standard mental health services.

Alternative therapy is used *instead of* usual health practices. Complementary therapy is used *in addition to* usual health practices.

These therapies can be used to help mental and physical health. Examples of alternative and complementary therapy can include:

- Acupuncture
- Art therapy
- Equine therapy
- Exercise
- Hypnosis
- Music therapy
- Nutritional supplementation (healthy things added to a diet)

**Always talk with the child's pediatrician (medical provider) before starting any new treatment.**

## Occupational and physical therapy [12]

Occupational therapy can help a child improve their ability to do daily tasks (focuses on small muscles).

Physical therapy can help a child improve their quality of movement (focuses on big muscles).

These therapies can also promote social wellness and physical independence. Children with physical and behavioral issues can benefit from these therapies.



## Speech or hearing services [13, 14]

Speech and hearing services include screenings and treatments. Screenings check a child's speech and hearing to figure out if there is a problem. If there is a problem, speech therapy may be used as a part of treatment. Speech therapy can help improve a child's language and communication skills.

Depending on the issue the child has, other treatments may be needed. Below are a couple of treatment options:

- Bone anchored hearing aid
- Cochlear implant
- Ear tube insertion
- Hearing aids

## Support groups [15]

Support groups are meetings where people with similar lived experiences talk with one another. These groups can provide understanding, hope, and useful information.

## Health care transition planning and services [16]

Transition planning and services help make sure there is a good plan in place to help a child move from child to adult healthcare services. This occurs when they no longer qualify for certain services because of their age. This can happen between the ages of 12 - 26 years.



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