

Mental Health Toolkit

*for parents and caregivers of children & young adults
in Central Massachusetts and surrounding areas*

Shine
Initiative

www.ShineInitiative.org

*A resource for the
community,
developed by
the Shine Initiative*





This toolkit was created to aid young people and the adults in their lives who may be confronted with a mental health issue.

Thank you for your continued support.

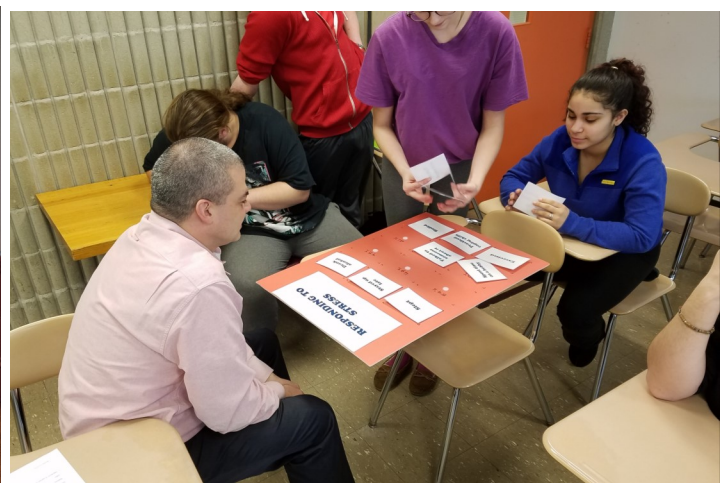


Table of Contents

Introduction	2
About the Shine Initiative	3
What You Should Know About Mental Illness	4
Definition of Mental Illness	4
Causes of Mental Illness	4
Mental Illness in Young People	5
Signs of Mental Illness	6
How Do I Tell Someone I Need Mental Health Care?	7
Who Can I Talk To?	8
Having the Conversation	9
Helpful Strategies For Having The Conversation With Someone Who May Be In Distress	10
Warning Signs of Suicide	11
Risk Factors for Suicide	11
What To Do If You Or Someone You Know Is Suicidal	12
Quick Tips to Improve Your Mental Health	13
Coping Skills for Young Children	14
Coping Skills for Elementary Aged Children	15
Coping Skills for Middle Schoolers and Beyond	16
Impact of Ignoring Mental Illness	17
What is a Licensed Mental Health Professional?	18
Selecting A Mental Health Professional	19

Welcome

As children, most of us see a pediatrician and continue to see a Primary Care Provider as we transition into adulthood.

We may visit Urgent Care clinics or Emergency Rooms when we are injured, sick or require immediate physical care.

However, many of us don't know how to access a mental health professional, or even let someone know we may need to talk about our mental health.

We hope this toolkit will provide youth of all ages, and the adults in their lives, with helpful information, answers to questions, coping skills and resources.

Together we can all learn that the best way to care for your body is to also Make Time for Your Mind.



(The Shine Initiative is funded entirely through contributions from businesses, civic groups, charitable foundations, corporations and individuals.)

Shine Initiative

The Shine Initiative mission is to combat discrimination and destigmatize mental health conditions in children and young adults.

The Shine Initiative proudly collaborates with schools, youth-serving agencies, and other community organizations, to promote mental health awareness and education.

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www.Shineinitiative.org



The Shine Initiative mission is to combat discrimination and destigmatize mental health conditions in children and young adults.

About the Shine Initiative

In 2004, the Shine Initiative was established under the leadership and guidance of Fidelity Bank and a community-based Advisory Board, with a goal to “shine a light on mental illness.” In recent years the Shine Initiative has honed its focus on the mental health of children and young adults.



Why?

We know that half of lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14. We want young people, and the adults in their lives, to feel comfortable with recognizing warning signs and knowing when to ask for help...but also knowing how to take care of their everyday mental health needs.



We know how important it is to normalize the conversation surrounding mental health, and we want youth voice to be heard.



What Is Mental Illness?

A Mental illness is a condition that can affect your mood, thinking, emotions and behavior. It often affects these things for a period of two weeks or more and is diagnosed by a professional.

Some commonly known examples are Depression, Anxiety, Bipolar, Attention Deficit Disorder, Eating Disorders, among others.

Mental illness is not a weakness– it is real and it is treatable.

In many cases, mental illness can be managed through psychotherapy, and/or medication. Nutrition, exercise and lifestyle changes can also have beneficial effects on mental health and wellness.



What Causes Mental Illness?

There is no one cause for mental illness, but rather a variety of factors.

Genetics

Mental illness can be more common in people who have a family history, just as with other illnesses. This does not mean it is guaranteed, but it can play a role.

Environment.

Traumatic brain injury, or exposure to viruses, toxins or drugs/alcohol while in the womb.

Life experiences.

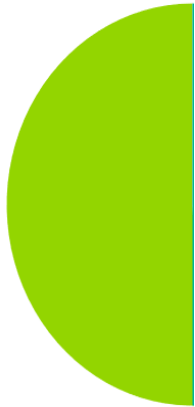
Challenging situations in your life, such as the loss of a loved one, financial problems, trauma and high stress can play a role in triggering mental illness.

Brain chemistry.

Known as biochemical causes, changes occurring in the chemicals of the brain can be a factor in mental illness..



Mental Illness in Young People



50%
of all
lifetime cases of mental
illness begin by age 14
and 75% by age 24.

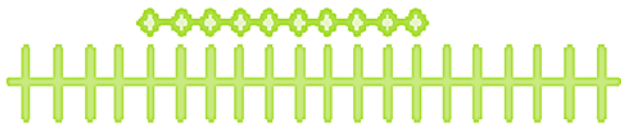
1 in 5 children

ages 13-18 have or will have a
serious diagnosable mental illness.



2nd

Suicide is the 2nd
leading cause of death
for young people.



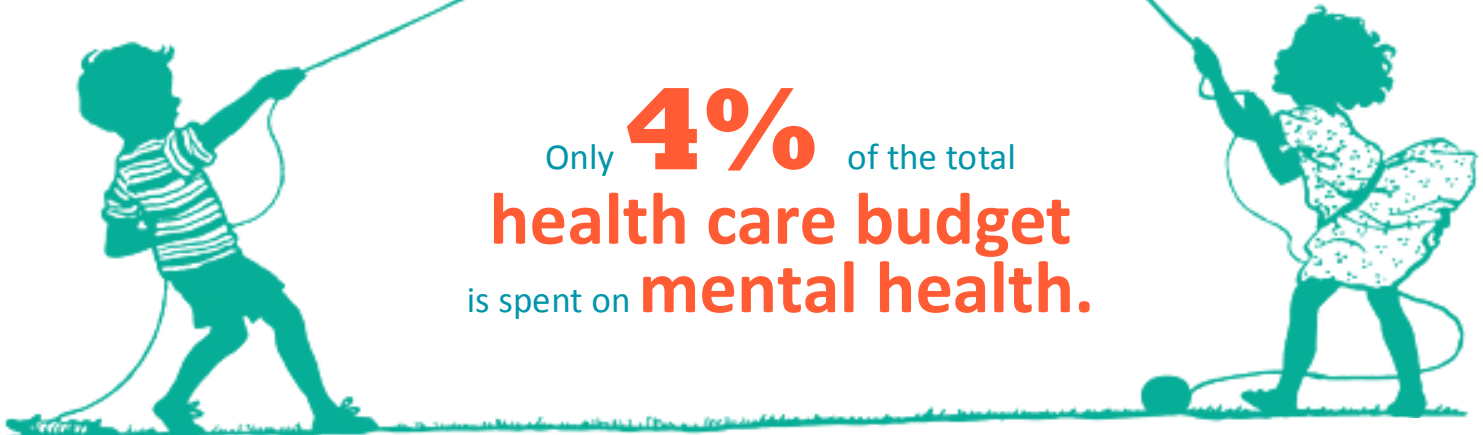
The average delay between onset of
symptoms and intervention is

**8-10
years.**



31.5% of
high schoolers (grades 9-12)
report feeling "sad or
hopeless" for a period of two
weeks or more.

Only **4%** of the total
health care budget
is spent on **mental health.**



Signs of Mental Illness



The following are some possible warning signs of a mental illness. These usually persist over several weeks.

- Noticeable change in school performance.
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities.
- Noticeable changes in sleeping and/or eating habits (too much or too little).
- Many physical complaints (i.e. headaches and stomach aches).
- Risky sexual behavior.
- Extended period of negative mood.
- Thoughts of or preoccupation with death or suicide.
- Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Change in hygiene, lack of personal self care
- Preoccupation with food, weight, exercise and/or body image
- Persistent nightmares.
- Threats of self-harm or harm to others.
- Self-injury or self-destructive behavior. (i.e. cutting, burning, hair pulling, etc.).
- Frequent outbursts of anger, aggression.
- Threats to run away.
- Aggressive actions towards others; opposition to authority, truancy, theft, or vandalism.
- Paranoid or irrational thoughts, feelings; and behaviors.

How To Ask For Help

Reaching out to a **trusted caregiver** isn't always easy. But telling someone about how you are feeling, and what is going on in your head, is the first and most important step in getting help.

Caregivers are parents, grandparents, other family members, or guardians. **Caregivers** are people who love you and support you in life. They play an important role in your health and well-being.



How to Start The Conversation

- Talk about the feelings or changes that yo've noticed (Check out Signs of Mental Illness for examples)
- Tell them when you started having these feelings or changes
- Let them know you would like their help, and how they might be able to help



Remember, You Know Best How You Feel.

Sometimes, a parent/caregiver can be confused or unsure how to react. Remember this: you know best "how you feel." You are important and deserve to be heard.

An Important Reminder

If you, or someone you know is in crisis and needs immediate help, we urge you to contact a crisis hotline, or go to the Emergency Department of your local hospital.



Suicide Prevention Hotlines

(These hotlines also provide basic mental health help and can also help you with how to talk to your caregiver)

**National Suicide
Prevention Lifeline**

(800) 273-8255

**National Crisis
Textline**

Text HOME to
741-741

**Trevor Project
(For LGBTQ+)**

(866) 488-7386

**Trans Lifeline
(For Trans People)**

(877) 565-8860

**Samaritans Statewide
Helpline (MA)**

(877) 870-4673

Call or Text

Who Can I Talk To?

Look for a supportive caregiver to have this conversation with. Bring notes to remind you of important things you want to share.

You should talk to your caregiver about how you are feeling and that you want to talk to a professional to see if you need more help. If you recall, a caregiver is someone who provides direct care to you and someone who loves you. This can be parents, grandparents, guardians, foster parents, or other family members.



Do I Have To Do This Alone?

No. While it is important to tell your caregiver that you need support, there are other people who can help you have this conversation. Those people are called **trusted adults** (someone you feel safe discussing what you are experiencing and you know that they will help you). A **trusted adult** might be a teacher, your doctor, a coach, a religious leader, guidance counselor, or a school adjustment counselor.

Be persistent!

If you feel that you should be checked by a mental health professional or a doctor, for whatever reason, and the person you approach doesn't respond in the way that you need—keep reaching out. You know yourself better than anyone else. Often people don't know how to react to a mental health need because they were never taught how to respond and they are unsure how to reply—be persistent until you get the response you need. That also might mean you have to approach another caregiver for help and that's okay—**keep asking until you get the help you need.**



Having the Conversation

Remember you have been preparing to have this conversation! You have notes if you want to use them and you can ask a trusted friend or adult to be there when you have this discussion.

You want to have this conversation with someone who:

- ⇒ Gives good advice when asked and needed.
- ⇒ Respects someone's privacy and can be trusted.
- ⇒ Allows you to talk freely about your feelings and emotions without judging, teasing, or criticizing.

Before having the conversation make sure:

- This is the appropriate setting for the conversation.
- You have enough time to have a complete conversation.
- This is the right person for the conversation

How To Have the Conversation As A Caregiver

- Listen to the person without judgment. Understand this is a hard conversation for them to be having with you.
- Respect their privacy– they chose you for a reason.
- Ask open-ended questions to learn more about what they are experiencing (i.e. Describe that more to me? How does that feel physically/emotionally? What else have you noticed? Who can we talk more about this with? Have you ever experienced something like this before? What has helped you through this before, if anything? How can I help you more?)
- Remind them that there is hope and help.
- Remember it's okay to not have all the answers. Follow up with someone who can help further. (i.e. a mental health professional or your child's primary care physician)



Helpful Strategies for Having Conversations with Someone Who May Be in Distress

Listen to the person without judgment

- Make sure this is the right time and the right place for this conversation—do you have enough time to have this conversation? Some conversations are short, others are much longer, do you have the appropriate amount of time to dedicate to this person? Is this the right venue for this conversation—should you move to an office, go for a walk, etc.?
- Respect the person’s feelings, culture, personal values, and experiences as valid—it’s okay to refer a student to more appropriate resources if you feel you are not the right person for the situation.
- Be genuine and empathetic—avoid sarcasm, hostile statements, patronizing statements, and being judgmental.
- Use objective statements—not subjective.
- Listen to what the person has to say and how they are saying it.
- Body language conveys a lot of information to a person—try to stand at a 45 degree angle to avoid coming across as aggressive, stand or sit with an open posture, be confident, be mindful of your facial expressions. Sitting down or coming down to a child’s level may seem less threatening to a person.
- Silence is okay, let the person have time to think before saying things.
- Avoid talking about your experiences—it’s about the person you’re helping, not you.
- Don’t interrupt the person when they are speaking.

Give applicable information and reassurance

- Let them know you appreciate that they trust you.
- Do not blame the person for their experiences.
- Give the person hope and be realistic .
- Do not belittle or dismiss the person’s beliefs or feelings.
- Don’t lie to them, let them know if you have to report something.
- Remember your limits.

De-escalating a Potential Situation

- Be confident, calm, gentle, and caring.
- Remember your body language, are you at a safe distance for the situation?
- Make sure the person can understand you—speak a little slower, do not yell at the person.
- Don’t challenge or doubt a person’s thoughts or beliefs.
- Do not threaten.
- Use positive framing or a positive perspective on any event, especially one that appears on the surface and at the present to be negative.
- Do not restrict the person.
- Avoid potential triggers if you know of any.



Warning Signs of Suicide



Talk

- Being a burden to others
- Feeling trapped
- Being in unbearable pain
- Having no reason to live
- Killing themselves



Behavior

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Looking for ways to kill themselves
- Withdrawing from usual activities, family or friends
- Sleep changes
- Acting recklessly
- Saying goodbye to loved ones
- Giving away possessions
- Aggression



Mood

- Depression
- Loss of interest
- Rage
- Irritability
- Humiliation
- Anxiety
- Sudden happiness

Risk Factors for Suicide

Health Factors

- Mental Illness
- Substance Use
- Physical Illness
- Chronic Pain

Environmental Factors

- Stressful Life Events
- Prolonged Stressful Situations
- Access to Lethal Means
- Exposure to Suicide

Historical Factors

- Previous Suicide Attempt
- Family History of Suicide Attempt

What To Do If You Or Someone You Know Is Suicidal

If someone you know is suicidal...

- ◆ Contact a trusted adult
- ◆ If possible do not leave the person alone
- ◆ Get help immediately, or send someone else to get help
- ◆ Remove access to means, if you can (medications, weapons, or other things someone may use to make an attempt)
- ◆ Never put yourself in harm's way
- ◆ If calling 911, give them every detail you have about the situation: risk factors, warning signs, things the person has said, past attempt history, mental illnesses if known



What If I Am Suicidal?



Talk to a trusted adult



Call/text a hotline



Go to the hospital



Call 911

Suicide Prevention Hotlines

(These hotlines also provide basic mental health help and can also help you with how to talk to your caregiver)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

(800) 273-8255

National Text Line

Text HOME to 741-741

Trans Lifeline (For Trans People)

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Samaritans Statewide Helpline (MA)

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Call or Text

Quick Tips to Improve Your Mental Health

There are many things that can negatively affect your mental health.

These include lack of sleep, poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and such stressors as school, social relationships, work and career, even family obligations.

There are also several things everyone can do to help improve one's mental health. These includes changes to diet, sleep habits, and coping mechanisms. Some of these changes can easily be applied to anyone's daily routine.

1. Develop a Healthy Routine

Did you know that proper nutrition and exercise can benefit your body *and* your mind!

When your body and your mind are in good shape you're better equipped to manage routine tasks, but also the stress that can be the result of new challenges and life experiences.

Did you know that depression and low self esteem have been linked to poor nutrition and weight issues? The next time you think about reaching for the junk food, think about healthier alternatives. When you're bored go for a run or walk, or do yoga instead of turning on your game system!



2. Get Proper Sleep

Lack of sleep can interfere with focus and performance. Healthy amounts of sleep can boost your memory and improve your attention and performance in school, at home, or at work! Better rest can also help you to make better decisions and to think more clearly.

3. Do Some Positive Coping

Positive coping mechanisms can help relieve stress or anxiety. Some common positive coping mechanisms are: writing, drawing, meditating, baking, taking a walk, /being in nature, or talking to friends.



4. Ask For Help

If you find that our tips aren't helping, or your health concerns persist, it might be a sign of something deeper and you should ask for help.

Identify people in your life who you can trust and you know will help you. These people can be parents, caregivers, teachers, coaches, counselors, religious leaders, family, and friends.

We all get overwhelmed from time to time.

Our message is simple:

Don't be afraid to ask for help!

Coping Skills for Young Children

Sea Life Sensory Solutions



Pufferfish Puff

Puff out your cheeks like a puffer fish does!

Fill your cheeks with air and hold for 5 seconds.



Clam Cuddle

Wrap your arms around yourself like a clam shell!

Place your hands on the opposite shoulders and squeeze.



Turtle Tongue

Poke your tongue out like a turtle pokes out its neck!

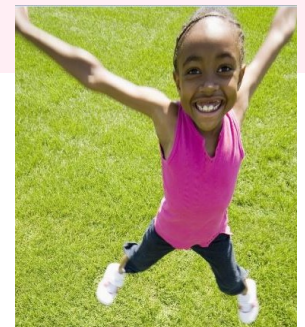
Stick your tongue out and quickly hide it again.



Starfish Stretch

Stretch out your arms and legs like a starfish!

Stretch your arms and legs out as wide as you can.



Coping Skills for Elementary-Aged Children

What to do when you're sad, mad or feeling bad*...

- *Intended for use with young children through elementary age*



1. Allow and express your feelings- all of them!
2. ASK FOR HELP
3. Dance. Dance silly or seriously- whatever feels right!
4. Sing
5. Do exercise, yoga, stretch your muscles
6. Hang out with someone (friend or family)
7. Eat your favorite snack
8. Go for a walk around your house
9. Take a nap or rest
10. Watch the clouds
11. Ride your bike (with permission)
12. Go play
13. Watch a sporting event
14. Read a book or magazine
15. Write a letter to someone
16. Draw a picture
17. Write a story, movie, play or poem
18. Play with a pet
19. Go outside and look at nature (with permission)
20. Watch a movie or TV show
21. Listen to music
22. Play a game with someone
23. Play an instrument
24. Do a puzzle
25. Write down things you like about yourself
26. Learn, or make up, a new language
27. Take pictures or videos of things that you like
28. Paint your nails (with permission)
29. Take a bath or shower
30. Ask friends and family to remind you that things will be ok
31. Breathe in and out deeply and slowly
32. Call a friend or family member
33. Clean up a corner of your room
34. Make silly faces at yourself in a mirror
35. Lay down on the ground
36. Look at pictures of people you love
37. Think of and tell funny jokes
38. Wrap yourself in a blanket or sheet
39. Build a pillow or blanket fort (with permission)
40. Do a craft or other art project; paint, sketch (with permission)



If none of these are helping you to feel better, talk to a grown up. Tell them how you are feeling—you know yourself best!

Coping Skills for Middle Schoolers and Beyond

Tips for taking care of yourself*...

** Intended for use with adolescents of middle school age and above*

1. BREATHE. In through your nose and out through your mouth
2. Allow and express your feelings- all of them!
3. ASK FOR HELP
4. Dance. Dance silly or seriously. Do what feels right
5. Do yoga, tai chi, Pilates, or stretching
6. Hang out with friends or family members
7. Eat your favorite snack
8. Go for a walk, jog, bike ride or hike (with permission)
9. Go outside and watch the clouds or look at nature
10. Take a nap or rest
11. Watch a sporting event
12. Pray or meditate
13. Write a letter to someone that has positively influenced you
14. Play with a pet
15. Watch a movie or TV
16. Play a game- video, board or card game
17. Listen to music
18. Write down things you like about yourself
19. Play a sport
20. Do a puzzle
21. Read a book or magazine
22. Write a story, movie, play or poem
23. Write in a journal- hopes, fears, wishes, dreams
24. Call or text family members or friends
25. Exercise or play a sport
26. Learn a new language
27. Sing
28. Play an instrument
29. Take pictures or videos of things you enjoy
30. Plant a garden
31. Work outside
32. Knit, crochet, or sew
33. Make a scrapbook
34. Paint your nails
35. Take a bath or a shower
36. Draw, paint or sketch
37. Make a bucket list
38. Invite a friend to come over (with permission)
39. Cook or bake (with permission)
40. Make a list of who you admire and why
41. Clean up a corner of your room or a space that is your own
42. Wrap yourself in a blanket
43. Look at photos of people you love



If you find that these tips aren't helping, or your mental health concerns persist, it might be a sign of something deeper and you should ask for help.

Identify people in your life who you can trust. These can be parents, caregivers, teachers, coaches, counselors, religious leaders, family and friends.

We all get overwhelmed from time to time and we want to convey the simple message: Don't be afraid to ask for help. After all, asking for help is a sign of *strength!*

Impact of Ignoring Mental Illness

In several of the largest communities in Massachusetts nearly **1 in 5** public high school students are chronically absent meaning they miss **18** or more days of school during an academic year. Many students tell us they recognize the importance of education, but issues such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral and emotional disorders make it difficult for them to attend school, and to focus when they attend school.

According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, one-fifth of college students experience a mental illness. Also, increasing numbers of students are seeking help for emotional problems that occur after they arrive at college.

Clinical depression often emerges for the first time in adolescence, at a time when young people are in high school, preparing or have entered college, or are beginning careers.



Early Treatment:

- Can keep illness from getting worse or lasting a long time
- Helps people return to their “normal selves” and restores functioning
- Minimizes disability
- This is true for depression, schizophrenia, bipolar mood disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, and many other illnesses.

It's important to know that treatment **does work** and people can learn to manage their illness.

If you or someone you know and care about is experiencing signs and symptoms of mental illness, confide in someone you can trust and seek professional help. To learn of professional help available in your community contact your primary care physician, pediatrician, school adjustment or guidance counselor, or health insurance provider.

What is a Licensed Mental Health Professional?

Psychiatrist.

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specializes in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental health, including substance use disorders. Psychiatrists are qualified to assess both the mental and physical aspects of psychological disturbance. A psychiatrist has completed medical school and an additional four or more years of residency training in psychiatry. They are able to prescribe medications to help ease mental health conditions.

Psychologist.

A psychologist has a doctoral degree (PhD, PsyD, or EdD) in psychology, which is the study of the mind and behaviors. Training provides a psychologist an education in evaluating and treating mental and emotional disorders. Licensed psychologists are qualified to do counseling and psychotherapy and provide treatment and evaluation for mental disorders. Psychologists do not prescribe medications.

Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Licensed Alcohol Drug Abuse Counselor (LADC).

LMHCs, LMFTs, and LCSWs are mental health professionals who have a master's degree in psychology, counseling, social work or a related field. In order to be licensed, the mental health professional also needs additional experience working with a qualified mental health professional after graduate school. Their licensure allows them to provide individual, marital, couple, family and group counseling and psychotherapy from a social work orientation. They are qualified to assess, diagnose and treat mental and emotional conditions and addictions, but cannot prescribe drugs.

Psychiatric or Mental Health Nurse (APRN).

Some nurses have had special training in providing mental health services (APRN). Depending on their level of training and certification, they can evaluate patients for mental illness and provide treatment in the form of psychotherapy.



Selecting A Mental Health Professional

Selecting the right mental health professional is important. *Developing a comfortable and confident relationship with a clinician is key to successful treatment.*

After all, the individual who is living with a behavioral, emotional or mental disorder knows best what they are feeling and experiencing. It's important, therefore, to be at ease with the mental health professional and to develop a mutually respectful and trusting rapport. Finding a care provider with whom you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, feelings, and the details of your life is a critical step to wellness.



Prior to committing to regular visits with a mental health provider, take time to ask questions and get to know him or her. If you or your child do not feel comfortable and relaxed, you are not obligated to engage his or her mental health services. Often, a mental health provider can help you find the best match by referring you to another professional. Follow-up on the referral, and be sure to ask questions again.

Questions to Ask On or Before Your First Visit



- Are you a licensed health service practitioner? How many years have you been providing mental health services?
- What is your availability? Will I be able to schedule appointments frequently, if necessary?
- My child has/ I have been feeling (anxious, tense, depressed, etc.), and having problems with (school, eating, sleeping, etc.). What experience do you have helping people with these types of problems?
- What are your areas of expertise - for example, working with children and families?
- What kinds of treatments do you use, and have they been proven effective for dealing with my/ my child's kind of problem or issue?
- If medication is indicated, can you prescribe? If not, how will that be handled?
- What are your fees? Do you have a sliding-scale fee policy? How much therapy would you recommend?
- What types of insurance do you accept? Will you accept direct billing to/payment from my insurance company? Do you accept Medicare/Medicaid insurance?

Shine Initiative

Make time for your mind.

*A leader in recognizing mental illness
in children and young adults
as a mainstream health issue.*

The Shine Initiative

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This mental health toolkit
has been prepared
by the Shine Initiative as a
community service.