

PREPARING FOR A MEETING WITH A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

A guide for parents and carers

This resource is for you if you're getting ready to meet a professional to talk about your child or young person's mental health. This might be:

- ✦ a GP
- ✦ a doctor or paediatrician
- ✦ a professional from Child Adolescent and Mental Health Services (CAMHS), the NHS mental health service for young people
- ✦ a professional from NHS adult mental health services

Whether you're speaking to these professionals for the first time, or you've been going to meetings like this for a while, it can be daunting. You might feel unsure about what to say or whether they'll really get it. We're here to help you feel prepared and supported, so it's easier to get the right help for your child. You can use this resource to think about what you'd like to say, questions you want to ask and what you'd like the professional to do next.

How to use this resource

If you're getting advice from a professional on your own, and your child/young person is not going with you:

Work your way through the questions in this resource and make some notes. Try to give examples and cover everything you've noticed, so the professional can understand what's going on.

Take the resource with you to the appointment. This way, you don't have to keep it all in your head.

You might want to ask someone you trust to come with you – maybe your child's other parent or a friend or family member. They can give support, make notes, listen and ask questions. This takes some of the pressure off you.

If you and your child/young person are going to the appointment together:

Ask your child how they want the meeting to go. Would they like to do most of the talking? Or would they like you to speak to the professional?

If they're up for it, have a look at the questions in this resource together. Support them to come up with their own answers first. If there's something you want to add, gently check if it sounds right. Use phrases like: 'I think I've noticed you're finding it harder to get to sleep at the moment too, have I got that right?'

It's important that your child feels in charge of the appointment and what's shared. Encourage them to think things through beforehand. But avoid putting pressure on them. Instead, be positive about the important step they're taking.

If your child/young person wants to attend the appointment on their own:

If they would like to spend some time getting ready for the appointment, either by themselves or with you, they can use our guides for young people:

- ✦ Speaking to the GP: youngminds.org.uk/young-person/GP
- ✦ Preparing for a CAMHS appointment: youngminds.org.uk/young-person/CAMHS

Ask how you can support them. You could take them to the appointment but wait outside. Or you could be around on phone or text afterwards.

Finding out what help is available

Whatever situation you're in, it's a good idea to find out what kind of support is out there. Have a look online, or chat to people who've been through it, before answering the questions in this resource. This way, you'll know how the professional should respond, and it will be easier to ask them to take specific actions.

You can also contact our Parents Helpline to talk it through with one of our advisers (details at the end of this resource).

You can get information from our Parents' A-Z Mental Health Guide, which covers things like anxiety, low mood, eating problems and self-harm.

youngminds.org.uk/parent/mental-health

YOUNGMINDS

DESCRIBING YOUR CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

At the start of the meeting, let the professional know that you and/or your young person would like to describe how things are. You can use these three questions to help you.

How is your young person feeling?

Are they worrying a lot, having difficult thoughts, feeling low or finding it hard to manage their anger?

- * How long has this been going on?
- * What impact does this have on their life? Try to comment on a few different areas, like home, school, friendships, family relationships and hobbies.
- * How has this affected their behaviour? Are they eating differently or struggling with sleep?
- * Is there something you or they are particularly concerned about?
- * What are things like on their worst day?

Write your notes here

Have you or your young person tried anything already?

This might be things like self-care, new strategies at home, calling helplines, getting support at school or seeing a counsellor. It can be helpful to show that you've tried making things better at home, but now your young person needs some more support.

Write your notes here

What have other professionals noticed?

If your child feels comfortable with this, ask another professional who's working with them, like a counsellor or someone at school, to write some notes explaining what they've noticed. This can help to support what you're saying.

Write your notes here

QUESTIONS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL

This part is about helping you think through what you want to ask. Remember it's okay to ask as many questions as you need to. It's also completely normal to get the professional to repeat or explain something you haven't understood.

What questions do you want to ask the professional?

Depending on your child's age and situation, this could include:

- * What kind of support do you think will be helpful?
- * What information/resources/signposting can you give us?
- * What services can you help my child access? What kind of support do they provide? Is there a waiting list and how long is it?
- * Are there services available that can meet my young person's needs? This could be a service that specialises in supporting neurodivergent young people or one that can give culturally-informed support.
- * Does that medication have any risks or side effects? How will you manage these? What do we need to be aware of?
- * What should I do if my child needs urgent support?

Write your notes here

What would you like the professional to do?

This might include:

- * Making a referral for counselling, either with the NHS or another local service.
- * Signposting you to local organisations that can help, such as low-cost counselling or peer support services.
- * Making a referral to NHS mental health services for more specialist help. If your child is under 18, this is usually Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). It could also be to your local hospital if your child needs to see a paediatrician. If your child is 18 or over, it's NHS adult mental health services.
- * Writing a letter to support a referral that another professional, such as a counsellor or teacher, has already made

Write your notes here

WRITING NEXT STEPS DOWN

At the end of the meeting, make a note of the actions that have been agreed.

What's happening next?

What is the professional going to do? Is there anything you or young person will do?

Write your notes here

What will you do if they need another appointment or things get worse?

The professional should tell you how to make another appointment and who to contact if things get worse. Get a name and contact details so it's easy to follow up.

Write your notes here

OUR PARENTS HELPLINE CAN SUPPORT YOU

Our Helpline supports parents and carers who are concerned about their child or young person's mental health. Our advisers can talk through what's happening and what the different options for support might be. They can also help you prepare for meetings and appointments.

We're open Monday - Friday

9.30am – 4pm.

Call:

0808 802 5544

Webchat:

youngminds.org.uk/parents-helpline