



# When & Where to Seek Help For Your Child

---

Parents are usually the first to notice when their child is having difficulty coping with emotions or dealing with relationships. A gentle and honest talk with the child about feelings can often help resolve a problem before it gets out of hand. When this doesn't work, it is often helpful to talk to the child's teachers or other adults who know the child well.

Sometimes a parent may feel confused about their child's behaviour and powerless to control it. In these situations it is advisable to speak to a GP about seeking further assistance from a trained mental health professional. The stigma and general lack of knowledge surrounding mental health issues can make the decision to seek professional help a difficult and painful one for both the parent and child.

When choosing a professional, parents are advised to enquire about qualifications, training and experience, as what works for adults may not be suitable for children. It is also important to find someone that both the parents and the child are comfortable with.

## When to Seek Help

It is important to seek help if any of the following problems persist over an extended period and are having a significant impact on the child's happiness or relationships.

### Younger Children

- Marked change in school performance
- Poor grades despite hard work
- A lot of worry or anxiety
- Refusal to go to school or other regular activities on a continuing basis
- Increased hyperactivity and fidgeting
- Nightmares
- Persistent disobedience, aggression, temper tantrums or rebellion against authority figures

### Pre-Adolescents and Adolescents

- Marked change in school performance
- Inability to cope with regular activities
- Marked change in sleeping and eating habits
- Physical complaints
- Depression, sustained low mood, negative outlook on life, pessimism about the future
- Abuse of body (i.e. alcohol, drugs, sexual acting out, self harm)
- Nightmares
- Aggression, prolonged outbursts

- Running away from home or threats to do so
- Unusual thoughts or feelings, distracted, 'not with it'
- Suicide threats.

### **Where to Seek Help?**

There are a number of avenues that a parent can take to get help for their child. It is usually best to start with a local General Practitioner. They can assess the situation and make a referral to an appropriate agency or specialist.

### **Child and adolescent psychiatrist**

A child and adolescent psychiatrist has specific training beyond general psychiatry with an emphasis on children, adolescents and families. They provide a medical and psychiatric evaluation of the child, and have access to a full range of treatments for behavioural and emotional problems. They can also prescribe and monitor medications.

### **Child and adolescent team**

Many community health services have a small team of practitioners who specialise in child and adolescent mental health. You can find your local Community Health Centre under 'C' in the Business & Government White Pages.

### **Outpatient Clinics**

Many public hospitals also have specialist clinics dealing with child and adolescent mental health. Ask your GP about the services that exist in your area.

### **Telephone and Website Information**

- Mental Health Information Service: 1300 794 991 for information about services in your area
- Parent Line: 1300 1300 52
- Kids Help Line: 1800 551 800
- Reachout: [au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com).



### **Telephone Interpreter Service 131 450**

If English is not your first language please call the Mental Health Information Service through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). This service is free to non-English speaking Australian citizens or permanent residents. TIS have access to interpreters speaking more than 120 languages and dialects.



## **Medicare Rebates and Accessing Private Practitioners**

### **What is the difference between psychiatrists and psychologists?**

Psychiatrists are medically trained doctors who specialise in the treatment of mental illness. Like GPs they can prescribe, administer and monitor medication. Psychiatrists do not advertise so it is up to your GP to refer you to someone appropriate.

Psychologists are trained in human behaviour and use a range of therapies to treat patients. They provide services including assessment, psychological testing, and various types of psychotherapy and counselling.

### **Medicare rebate for psychologists**

A Medicare rebate is now available for a number of sessions per calendar year with a registered psychologist\* with a Medicare Provider Number. To obtain the rebate you must be referred by an appropriate medical practitioner, i.e. a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician. The practitioner will ensure that you meet the eligibility requirements and develop a management plan for your condition.

The cost and rebate from Medicare can vary depending on the consultation length and fee charged. If the psychologist bulk bills there will be no extra cost.

For further information about the rebate or to locate a psychologist in your area contact the Australian Psychological Society on 1800 333 497 [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au).

\* Similar Medicare rebates also exist for mental health accredited social workers and occupational therapists.

### **Mental Health Resource Centre**

The Resource Centre contains material that promotes a better understanding of mental health issues. New books and DVDs are purchased on a regular basis and visitors are welcome to come in and browse.

Members of MHA, CAG and ARAFMI may check-out resources on loan. The length of the loan is 3 weeks. Membership costs between \$10 - \$30 per individual per annum. Please note that most of the reference books are not available for loan.

You will find the Resource Centre Booklist on our website: [www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au) for further information contact 1300 794 991.

**Disclaimer**

*This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed. The listed websites provide additional information, but should not be taken as an endorsement or recommendation.*

*This information may be reproduced with an acknowledgement to the Mental Health Association NSW. This and other fact sheets are available for download from [www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au). The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.*

*This fact sheet was last updated in July 2010.*



mental health  
information service

Mental Health Information Service  
Mental Health Association NSW Inc  
Level 5, 80 William Street  
East Sydney NSW 2011

Phone: 1300 794 991  
Fax: (02) 9339 6066  
Email: [info@mentalhealth.asn.au](mailto:info@mentalhealth.asn.au)  
Web: [www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au)