

Children's Mental Health

Tips for getting help and what you can do while you wait

It can be challenging to know where to begin to support your child or teen when new or persistent mental health needs impact their day-to-day life. Whether you already have your child on a waiting list for services or are just beginning to explore treatment options, here are some steps you can take while you wait.

- 1) **Schedule an appointment with your child's primary pediatrician.** Bring a list of your concerns and questions and rule out any underlying medical conditions. You can discuss care, treatment options, and any needed referrals to get you started.
- 2) **Call the children's mental health services in your county** to learn about case management services and how the county can help connect you with resources in your community.
- 3) **Reach out to your insurance provider** to help locate medical services covered by your plan in your area.
- 4) **Connect with a mental health provider.** Share any new concerns with them and discuss care and treatment options including crisis stabilization if you feel like your child needs more support.
- 5) **Discuss medications with your child's providers** and if it would be an appropriate next step to help treat their mental health condition(s). If they already take medications, it may be time to review and discuss if they are still the best medications and appropriate doses. As your child or teen grows, their medication needs may change. **Discuss PRN medications with your child's provider** (PRN is Latin for "pro re nata," which simply means "as needed") and if they would be appropriate for use during times of increased stress, anxiety, or dysregulation.
- 6) **Ask your child's school if they have access to Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports (CTSS)** and what other resources they may offer to students needing mental health support. If they do not offer any support, ask them to consider adding those services.
- 7) **Create a home crisis plan of what steps you will take to keep everyone safe during a mental health crisis.** Together, you and your child can create a crisis and safety plan. Include a statement about how your child looks and acts when calm and happy as a baseline. List triggers, words, gestures, or situations that increase concerning behaviors, and how your child looks and acts when those behaviors are increasing. Next, list specific actions that have helped calm behaviors in the past, strategies they feel help prevent a crisis, and how and when to use them. Include a list of other adults who can help, how they can help, and when they should be contacted. This should include information about when you would call the 988-crisis line or go to the emergency room. Learn more at PACER.org/cmh/learning-center/crisis-planning/crisis-management.asp.

- 8) **Call the 988 National Crisis Line or text HOME to 741741 for free crisis and emotional support 24/7.** They will connect you to a trained crisis counselor to help you cope, identify and access resources, and develop an action plan. If you are uncertain how the Crisis Line could help support you and your child, take some time to learn more about this resource. Similarly, if you are worried about needing to call 911 in a crisis, consider connecting with your local police station to build a relationship with them and learn more about how they respond to mental health calls. If you are not comfortable doing this, you may want to talk with the child's doctor or case manager to help you come up with a plan that will work for your family.
- 9) **Contact PACER at 952-838-9000 or PACER@PACER.org to learn more about how to get a special education evaluation** for your child. If they already have a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Program (IEP), PACER can help you advocate for them. There is no way to know if your child will or will not qualify for special education without having the school complete an evaluation.
- 10) **You can do this. You are not alone.** Connect with other parents to get support. You can find groups online and on social media, as well as through children's mental health organizations and the Department of Human Services.