



**KNOWLEDGE  
NETWORK**

## **Taking Care: Child and Youth Mental Health**

BEHAVIOUR DISORDERS – TREATMENT

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### TREATMENT

Treatment for behaviour disorders depends on the specific disorder. For Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) alone and combined with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), pharmaceutical treatment is necessary and highly effective. There are several different types of medication for behaviour disorders: stimulant medications like Ritalin and Dexedrine, which are the most widely used, and non-stimulant medications like Strattera. Both types of medication work by changing the biology of the brain in such a way that the neurotransmitters are more active, more able to fire, causing the attention and inhibitory circuits to work better. Treatment of ADHD will often resolve ODD.

Some parents have trouble with the fact that their child needs to be on medication on a continuing basis. However, studies have shown that medication is essential to correct the symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattentiveness. Treating the symptoms allows the child to function better in the classroom, at home and socially.

Side effects from these medications are generally mild and can be controlled through adjustments in dosage. It's important to note that some trial and error with medications is necessary to figure out which one works best for the child, and at which dosage.

For secondary symptoms such as self-esteem issues, family conflict and academic underachievement, a combination of behaviour therapy, special education and parent training can help ensure that both the child and family members successfully manage the disorder, and that the child has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. It's important that both lines of treatment are used to maximize the potential for recovery.

Conduct Disorder (CD) is not neurological in origin (though neurological development has been implicated as a risk factor, which in combination with other risk exposure, increases the likelihood of CD developing) so it requires specific treatment aimed at underlying causal factors, such as difficulties with parenting. Because CD has multiple causes and impacts many areas of life, the treatment needs to address all of those domains and be systemic, including the home, school and social environments. Children with CD should be evaluated in multiple contexts, and offered programs tailored to their needs that mainly focus on the parenting issues, and on re-establishing healthy home, school and community activities and environments.



### FAQ

#### How can I get treatment?

In British Columbia, the mental health service system for children and youth involves a range of options. Services are offered throughout the province by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, both directly and through partnerships with community organizations, schools, medical facilities, doctors and others. Click the following link for a full list of the Ministry of Children and Family Development's Child and Youth Mental Health Offices in BC:

[http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental\\_health/pdf/services.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/pdf/services.pdf)

If you know your child needs treatment or you need help, you can take him or her directly to one of these offices. He or she will then go through a screening and intake process to determine appropriate treatment and referral. In some areas of the province, a wait for Ministry of Children and Family Development child and youth mental health services may occur. All new referrals are screened for severity and urgent cases are seen first.

If you aren't sure whether your child needs treatment, or where you should start, go to your family doctor, pediatrician or local clinic. Some physicians are trained in assessment and diagnosis of behaviour disorders and can treat them directly or refer your child to an appropriate specialist if necessary. You may also wish to consult a school counsellor as a first step in getting help.

In Vancouver, the British Columbia Children's and Women's Health Centres, Mental Health Programs' Provincial ADHD Program, offers access to a variety of specialists—child psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, an occupational therapist and a social worker - who come together to provide an assessment on each child. Group treatment is also offered. Referrals are made by family physicians, pediatricians and/or child psychiatrists.

The Maples Adolescent Centre, a designated provincial mental health facility providing residential, non-residential and outreach services to support youth, families and communities, offers a number of programs for behaviour-disordered children. The Response Program operates throughout the province and offers a psychiatric assessment and development of a treatment plan using community resources. The Bifrost program provides family therapy to help get the parents and the child into a better working relationship, and assists parents in better understanding their child's needs.



### What kind of specialist should my child see?

The type of specialist you see will depend on the severity of the disorder and required treatment. (In the case of Conduct Disorder, medical practitioners may not be involved at all.) Below are some basic definitions of the different kinds of specialists. Your family doctor or the Ministry of Children and Family Development Child and Youth Mental Health Teams can help assess your needs more specifically.

#### *General Practitioner (GP)*

Your GP, or family doctor, may be the first step in identifying a potential behaviour disorder. Some GPs are trained to recognize and diagnose mental health problems, while others may refer your child to a specialist.

#### *Psychiatrist*

Psychiatrists are physicians with specialized training in psychiatry. They utilize a variety of treatments to assist and manage mental health illness.

#### *Clinical Psychologist*

Clinical Psychologists are professionals trained in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders. Clinical psychologists assist people experiencing problems with their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and include performance of cognitive evaluations, or psycho-educational assessments among their areas of expertise. They are not medical doctors and do not prescribe medication. Psychologists are licensed practitioners who are regulated through the respective College in their jurisdiction.

#### *Registered Nurse*

Registered nurses can provide care in a variety of mental health areas. Many nurses work with individuals and families to assess various aspects of the mental health disorder in question. In mental health, there may also be registered psychiatric nurses who have special training in psychiatric disorders.

#### *Clinical Social Worker*

Clinical social workers provide assessment and treatment of mental, emotional and behavioural disorders and conditions. They can provide psychosocial interventions to enhance personal, interpersonal and social functioning. A clinical social worker typically holds a master's degree in social work.

#### *Occupational Therapist*

An occupational therapist is trained to assess and treat individuals to promote increased participation in meaningful life activities including self care (brushing teeth, tying shoes), productivity (school or work) and leisure (play, sports, recreation). Occupational performance may be impacted by difficulty with motor coordination (e.g. developmental coordination disorder or written output disorder), visual perceptual skills, sensory processing and attention learning or social skills.



### What is the cost of treatment?

Visits to your family doctor and Ministry of Children and Family Development Child and Youth Mental Health Teams (which include psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, counsellors and nurses) are funded by the provincial government and there is no cost to the patient or his or her family. Not all of these mental health clinicians are available in every community, however. Some communities have all five disciplines represented, whereas others have only one or two. Treatment by private practicing specialists such as psychologists, therapists and counsellors may be covered under personal extended health care plans. Workplace employee assistance programs will often pay for some sessions, so check with your insurance provider for details. The cost will depend on the course of treatment required and the length of time treatment is underway.

For more info, contact:

BC College of Family Physicians

<http://www.bccfp.bc.ca>

College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC

<https://www.cpsbc.ca/cps>

College of Psychologists of BC

<http://www.collegeofpsychologists.bc.ca>

Board of Registration for Social Workers of BC

<http://www.brsw.bc.ca>

Registered Nurses Association of BC

<http://www.rnabc.bc.ca>

Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of British Columbia

<http://www.crpNBC.ca>

College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia

<http://www.cotbc.org>

Canada's Occupational Therapy Resource Site

<http://www.otworks.ca>

### When is hospital treatment required?

The large majority of children and youth suffering from behaviour disorders do not require hospital treatment.



How long is medication required?

The length of time medication is required will depend upon the severity of the disorder. Sometimes it is required indefinitely; however dosages can be reduced over time. Suddenly stopping medication can be dangerous—causing side effects or enabling the illness to return—so be sure to consult your doctor before initiating changes.