

How to make decisions about mental health medication

Making the right decisions regarding a young person's mental health can be a scary prospect, particularly when it comes to medication. So here are five tips from NHS mental health professionals that might help you to understand and decide the next steps.

1. Get professional advice

The internet and social media can lead you towards false or misleading information, and while you may have heard good things about a particular medication, what worked for one person may actually be harmful to someone else.

Where to get professional advice

- Talk to your GP, pharmacist or the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- Avoid buying medication online or using other people's in times of crisis.

2. Ask questions

There are always going to be pros and cons to any medication, so try to find out as much as you can about its benefits and balance that against any potential side effects. Talk to others whose experience may help, and when speaking to mental health professionals, be curious and remember there are no silly questions.

3. Share decisions

Any decision you take needs to be a shared one between you, your child and the clinician, each taking the necessary time to process the information, consider each other's perspective and chew over the pros and cons. Although making decisions together may take a little longer, it's better in the long run as it gets everyone on the same page.

4. Be realistic

While medication can help, it needs to be seen as a piece of jigsaw along with many other pieces.

Other things that can help to improve mental health

- Diet, exercise, sleep and social life all have a big impact on mental health, so encourage them to have a good balance of all of them.
- Therapy and physical activity also help and it might be the meds that give the boost to give confidence to try new things.
- Finding the right combinations of medication and other pieces of the jigsaw can take time, so be patient, but if it really looks like the medication's not working ask the clinician for review.

5. Keep things in perspective

Opting for medication can bring mixed emotions, from a sense of relief to a sense of defeat, which are both perfectly normal. While it can help them to get through a tough time in the short term, remember that it's not for ever. Try to see it as an important stepping-stone to getting well and make sure you continue to work together as a team in evaluating progress and monitoring any side effects.

Some additional resources that may help.

- Young Minds: Medications <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/medications/>
- Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust: Medicines for children and young people <https://www.derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk/getting-help/understanding-your-medication/medicines-children-and-young-people>
- NHS advice for supporting the mental wellbeing of others. Better Health: Every Mind matters (<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/>)
- For information on how to access NHS Mental health services visit <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/>
- Mind.org offers dedicated advice about parenting a child with a mental health problem <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/parenting-with-a-mental-health-problem/helping-your-children/>