

How to talk with mental health professionals

If your child is having mental health issues, it's likely that you'll need to engage with professionals, which might be a new experience. Here are five tips from NHS mental health professionals that might help to that might help you to get the information and support that you and your child need.

1. Your voice matters

Your child may struggle to express what they're experiencing and may need you to help them get their voice heard. While mental health professionals are experts in their field, you and your child are experts on what your child is experiencing, so don't be afraid to share what you know, no matter how minor it might seem.

Tips for making your voice count

- It can be hard to remember everything you wanted to say during a conversation so writing things down beforehand as they occur to you can help, making sure to include any questions you might have.
- It can also be useful to make a note of any significant events or changes that seem to influence your child's mental health either positively or negatively, along with the circumstances surrounding them, as they may help professionals to build up a more complete picture.
- If you're unsure or don't understand something the professional tells you, ask them to explain it and, remember, there are no silly questions.

2. Work as a team

Remember that you, your child and the professionals all want the same thing, which is your child's health and wellbeing, even if it might not always feel like it.

Tips for working together

- Talk to the professional and try to agree a way of communicating that includes you in the care.
- You can always ask for a parent - carer appointment to talk through anything that's on your mind.

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. Keep track

Write down as much as possible before and in-between appointments. Keeping a journal can help track progress and saves you having to keep explaining things. And again, agree a way of sharing appropriate information with those involved.

Useful things to write down

- A list of things that trigger distress, the signs to be on the lookout for that suggest things aren't good, and the things that help.
- Keeping a journal of crisis episodes, appointments and any treatments can save you from trying to remember and explain things to people.

5. Keep calm and carry on

When things don't go to plan or you're not getting the answers you hoped for, you may start to feel frustrated. This is perfectly normal and understandable. Try not to react while your emotions are running high.

Tips for reducing the impact of your emotions

- Take a deep breath, write down what's on your mind and wait until you feel calmer before responding, as this will help you to think things through more clearly and decide what to do next.
- Remember that your feelings are towards the situation and not the child.
- Try to focus on finding solutions rather than apportioning blame.

Some additional resources that may help.

- Young Minds: Supporting your child during counselling or therapy <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/counselling-and-therapy/#Supportingyourchildduringcounsellingorthrapy>
- RCPsych: Who's who is CAMHS? [https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/young-people/who-s-who-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-\(camhs-\)-information-for-parents-and-carers#faq-accoridon-collapse6caf6894-405f-4d4b-852b-3e51c3f854d3](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/young-people/who-s-who-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-(camhs-)-information-for-parents-and-carers#faq-accoridon-collapse6caf6894-405f-4d4b-852b-3e51c3f854d3)
- For advice on how to prepare for your first CAMHS appointment, visit our dedicated page <https://thismayhelp.me/how-to-prepare-for-your-childs-first-camhs-appointment>
- RCPsych: Mental health services and teams in the community <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/mental-health-services-and-teams-in-the-community>
-
- For advice on how to have a conversation with a child about mental health, visit our dedicated page <https://thismayhelp.me/how-to-talk-with-your-child-about-mental-health/>
- 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/>