

# Choosing a Mental Health Provider

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Mental health providers have different training and ways of treating children and teens. It is important to find a mental health provider who has received special training and education to treat children and teens, and whose experience and training are a good fit for your child and family.

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## What types of mental health providers might be helpful to my child and family?

There are many types of mental health providers for children and families. Each has a specific training and license. Here are the most common ones who treat children and teens with mental health issues:

- Psychiatrist – Completed medical school and specialized training in psychiatry. A medical doctor (MD) who can provide diagnosis, medicine evaluations and treatment. They can prescribe medicine. If your child needs to see a psychiatrist, look for one that is board certified as a child and adolescent psychiatrist.
- Clinical psychologist – Has a doctorate (Ph.D. or PsyD) degree in psychology, often completed an internship at a hospital or medical center. Are extensively trained in evaluation, psychological testing, diagnosis, and treatment, but do not prescribe medications. Look for a psychologist with specialized training with children and teens.
- Advanced practice provider (APP) – Advanced registered nurse practitioner (ARNP) or physician assistant (PA) with medical training who can provide medicine evaluation, diagnosis and prescribe medicine. Look for an ARNP or PA who has specialized training in psychiatry with children and teens.
- Licensed master's level therapist – completed graduate school at the master's level. There are many types of licensed master's level graduate programs and licenses. These include licensed mental health counselor, independent clinical social worker, and marriage and family therapist. They provide diagnostic evaluation and therapy. Look for a therapist who has specialized training with children and teens.

## How do I know what therapy is right for my child?

It is always a good idea to check with your child's pediatrician for recommendations. Teachers or other parents may also have providers they recommend. We urge you to ask questions and find out more about the type of therapy offered, the training and supervision of the provider you may be working with, costs and estimated duration of treatment.

Visit these websites to learn about types of therapy and which have been found to work well in treating mental health conditions in children and teens.

- Effective Child Therapy [effectivechildtherapy.org](http://effectivechildtherapy.org)

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### To Learn More

- Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine 206-987-2164
- Adolescent Medicine 206-987-2028
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org/patient-education](http://seattlechildrens.org/patient-education)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



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- Facts for Families Guide from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/Layout/FFF\\_Guide-01.aspx?hkey=c2dc89fb-aac1-4308-9297-eedfe7755b92](http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/Layout/FFF_Guide-01.aspx?hkey=c2dc89fb-aac1-4308-9297-eedfe7755b92)

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### **What do I look for when seeking therapy for my child or teen?**

Look for these qualities and experience when looking for a mental health provider for your child or teen:

- Has specialized training in work with children and adolescents.
- Starts with an evaluation to guide treatment plan.
- Uses a treatment approach that has been shown to work for the presenting problem (also called evidence-based treatment).
- Includes parents/caregivers in treatment.
- Uses standardized measures to help make diagnosis and show treatment progress.
- Has someone who can help when they are away.
- Has experience in treating your child's concern or are supervised by someone with that experience.

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### **What specific approaches should I look for if I know my child's diagnosis?**

Mental health providers use different types of treatment for different diagnoses or needs. If you know your child's diagnosis, look for these approaches when looking for a mental health provider for your child or teen:

- For anxiety or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) treatment: Look for providers that use cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), including or exposure response prevention (ERP) that focuses on exposures (facing fears).
- For attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) and other behavior problems: Look for providers that use parent management training and collaborate with other medical providers and schools.
- For depression: Look for providers that use cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), interpersonal therapy and/or behavioral activation (BA).
- For eating disorders: Look for providers that use family-based treatment or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) specific to eating disorders like enhanced CBT (CBT-E) or CBT for ARFID.
- For trauma: Look for providers that use trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT).
- For early onset psychosis or schizophrenia: Look for providers who are part of the first episode psychosis programs at [newjourneyswashington.org](http://newjourneyswashington.org) or who offer cognitive behavioral therapy for psychosis (CBTp).
- For substance use disorders: Look for providers who have dual credentialing as substance use professional and mental health provider. Referrals can be found by contacting Recovery Helpline at 866-789-1511 or Teen Link at 866-833-6546.

### What should I consider when looking for a therapist?

A mental health therapist or counselor is an important part of your child or teen's care team. Call or go to your insurance company website for names of mental health providers on your plan. Finding the right therapist can take a long time. There are many factors to keep in mind, such as:

- Do they take your insurance?
- Are they taking new patients?
- Where is their office?
- Are they familiar with children or adolescents dealing with similar challenges?

It can take a lot of phone calls or emails to find the right therapist.

Note: If you leave a voicemail message for a therapist, call again if you have not heard back in 24 hours. Some therapists may be more accessible by email. Often therapists do not have a receptionist. If they do not have any appointments available but offer to put you on a waitlist, take that option while you continue to call others. If you find another therapist, you can always decline the appointment.

For more information on how to find mental health providers, watch Finding Mental Health Care in Washington: A Class on Where to Start [seattlechildrens.org/health-safety/mental-health-resources/finding-mental-health-class](https://seattlechildrens.org/health-safety/mental-health-resources/finding-mental-health-class), a series of short self-paced videos taught by case managers at Seattle Children's.



### How do I know if I find a therapist who is a “good fit”?

Once you find a therapist or counselor, it can take some time to know if they are a good fit for your child or teen. Go to 3 or 4 visits before deciding if this is someone you both feel they can make progress with. While this process can take some time, it is some of the most important work you can do to support your child or teen.

If you are struggling to find a therapist or mental health services for your child or teen, call the Washington Mental Health Referral Service for Children and Teens at 833-303-5437 or visit [seattlechildrens.org/clinics/washington-mental-health-referral-service](https://seattlechildrens.org/clinics/washington-mental-health-referral-service)

