

# Mental Health Therapy

## Child and family therapy options for your child with autism

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This flyer helps explain different types of therapy for your child and family and how to get start finding services.

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### What is mental health therapy?

Mental health therapy is sometimes called counseling, psychotherapy or just “therapy.” It is a treatment based on the relationship between an individual and a mental health therapist, such as a psychologist, a clinical social worker, or a licensed mental health counselor (LMHC). It involves you, your child, and the therapist working together. Therapy goals are to identify the thought and behavior patterns that keep your child from feeling their best, then work on changing them.

With children, there is also a type of family-based therapy where the focus is on educating the parent and helping them develop skills to manage their child’s behavior (see Parenting Training section).

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### What are the most common types of therapy for my child?

It is important to find an evidence-based type of therapy for your child’s specific needs. Evidence-based means that there is strong research to support the effectiveness of the treatment program for a specific condition or symptoms.

Your provider may recommend one of these types of therapy for your child:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): most effective for managing anxiety and depression.
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) For Teens: focuses on improving interpersonal effectiveness, emotion regulation skills and frustration tolerance.
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT): used to treat children and teens who have been exposed to trauma, such as physical abuse.
- General Coping and Emotion Regulation Skills Training: for help with learning to manage anger and frustration.
- Social Skills Training (SST): learning and practicing social interactions and the basic skills that lead to successful and lasting relationships. It can be offered in individual or group therapy. Schools may also offer social skills group.
- To find out more about these therapies, go to [nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies](http://nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies)

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#### To Learn More

- Autism Center  
206-987-8080
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

#### 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.

### What is family therapy?

This is therapy offered to all members of a family together at the same time. It often focuses on:

- Parent education and support
- Skill-building (e.g., communication, emotion regulation and coping skills)
- Promoting family cohesion
- Support for family transitions, such as parental divorce

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### What is parent training?

Parent training is also called behavior management training. It is used to help decrease a child's challenging behaviors such as opposition, defiance, and aggression. It also works on increasing prosocial skills like cooperation and emotional control to enhance the parent-child relationship. Evidence-based parent training programs include, The Incredible Years (IY), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), or The Positive Parenting Program (Triple-P).

If your child has a developmental delay, it is best to work with a therapist who has experience and training in working with children with special needs.

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### How can I find a mental health therapist for my child?

1. Call your insurance carrier and find out more about coverage for mental health services.
2. Ask them for a list of providers who accept your insurance.
3. Share the list with your child's primary care doctor and ask if they know or recommend any of the therapists on the list.
4. Contact the therapists to ask if they offer the type of the treatment that was recommended by your provider.

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### A mental health evaluation was recommended for my child—What will this involve?

In some cases, a provider may suggest further mental health evaluation for your child. This is to clarify diagnoses and help determine whether mental health therapy is appropriate or needed. A mental health evaluation often involves assessment by a psychologist or psychiatrist.

The length and process for the evaluation can vary. At the intake appointment, ask your provider for specific information on what the evaluation will involve and how long it will take to get it.

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### How is a mental health evaluation different from a medication evaluation?

A medication evaluation involves separate assessment by a psychiatric provider who prescribes medicine. Medication can be an important and effective part of treatment for some psychiatric disorders or symptoms in children and adolescents.