

Comprehensive Psychiatric Evaluation for Children



What is a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation?

A psychiatric evaluation helps diagnose emotional, behavioral, or developmental problems. It's done based on the child's behaviors. The behaviors are assessed as to how they are affecting the child's life.

When should a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation be sought?

Parents are often the first to suspect a problem in their child or teen. This includes problems with friends or family relationships, school, sleeping, eating, substance abuse and other aspects of daily life. If a problem is suspected, treatment should be sought out as soon as possible.

What is involved in a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation?

The following are the most common elements that make up a comprehensive, diagnostic psychiatric evaluation. However, each evaluation is different, as each child's symptoms and behaviors are different. A comprehensive evaluation may need several hours over one or more visits. It will include interviews with the child and parents or guardians. Evaluation may include:

- Description of behaviors present, for example:
 - When do the behaviors happen and how long does it last?
 - What are the conditions in which the behaviors most often happen?
 - How do the behaviors impact performance in school and other activities as well as relationships with others (for example, family, classmates, or teachers)?
 - What has been tried in the past to help the child's behaviors?
- Description of symptoms (physical and psychiatric symptoms)
- Personal and family history of emotional, behavioral, or developmental disorders
- Complete health history, including description of the child's overall physical health, list of any other illnesses or conditions present, and any treatments currently being given.
- Lab tests, in some cases (may be used to determine if an underlying medical condition is present), including:
 - Blood tests
 - Radiology studies to look for abnormalities, especially in the brain
 - Educational assessments
 - Speech and language assessments
 - Psychological assessments

A parent's concerns when a child is being evaluated

It's natural, and quite common, for a parent to question themselves when a child or teen needs to be evaluated by a psychiatrist. Parents may have many questions and concerns as to the welfare and emotional well-being of their child. Common questions parents often ask include:

- What's wrong with my child?
- Is my child abnormal?
- Did I do something wrong in raising them to cause this condition?
- Does my child need to be hospitalized?
- Will my child need treatment?
- Will my child "outgrow" these behaviors?
- Will my other child/children also develop this condition?
- Is this just "a phase" my child is going through?
- What will treatment cost?
- Where do I go for help for my child?
- What does this diagnosis mean?
- How can my family become involved?

If a diagnosis is made based on 1 or more psychiatric evaluations, parent, and family involvement in treatment is very important for any child or teen with a mental health disorder. Your child's healthcare provider or mental health provider will address your questions and provide reassurance. They will work with you to establish long-term and short-term treatment goals for your child.

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