



ProjectTEACH

Your Child's Mental Health: What to Discuss During a Doctor Visit

As a parent, you know how much there is to think about in terms of your child's physical health during a primary care visit. But did you know that your child's pediatrician is interested in all aspects of his or her healthy development? This includes mental health.

Your child's primary care visit is the perfect time to bring up any emotional, behavioral, or mental health concerns you have. It's important to bring up any concerns now, just like you would do with physical health concerns. This helps doctors identify mental health issues early, before they become too serious.

Below are some changes your child's physician would want to hear about.

CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR

Have there been any visible changes in your child's everyday behavior?

For example:

- Appetite and eating patterns
- Sleep (significantly more or less, seeming tired all the time)
- Mood (sadness, worrying, nervousness, anxiety, stress, irritability)
- Relationships with friends (fewer friends, reluctance to attend play dates or summer camp)
- Behavior at home (distracted, aggressive, obsessive, more inflexible or upset about little things, temper tantrums)
- Willingness to go to school
- Reports on behavior at school
- Academic performance at school
- Interactions with parents, siblings, or other family members
- Toileting or bedwetting

CHANGES IN PERSONALITY

Have there been any obvious changes in your child's personality?

For example:

- More withdrawn or isolated
- Being more clingy
- Crying or acting more crabby than usual
- New obsessions (orderliness, video games, rituals, food)
- More defiant or breaking rules

CHANGES IN INTERESTS

Have your child's interests changed suddenly or dramatically?

For example:

- Not doing things they typically enjoy (spending time with friends, music, sports)
- Spending large amounts of time on new activities (exercising, watching TV)

SUMMARY

Any of these warning signs could be temporary changes in your child. Or it could be the beginning of something more serious. Keep in mind that 50% of mental health conditions begin by age 14. So you should bring up any concerns at your child's primary care visit as part of his or her overall health.