Preparing for Your Teen's Mental Health Appointment

What you are noticing, what your teen wants to share, and what to ask

When you are worried about your teen, it can be hard to know where to start. You may have a lot to say, while your teen has a different view of what has been happening.

A few notes can help you explain what you are seeing and make room for your teen's experience too. You do not need to arrive with a diagnosis or a perfect record.

You'll need: A pen, the appointment details and any current care or medication information the office has asked you to bring.

1. Start with what you have noticed. Choose a few examples. What changed, when did it begin, and how is it affecting everyday life? Include what is still going well.

2. Invite your teen's perspective. You might ask, "What would you like the clinician to understand?" Listen before adding your own explanation. Some things may be easier for them to discuss privately.

3. Write down your questions. What are you hoping to understand? You can ask about care options, what to do while waiting, and changes that would need more urgent help.

4. Ask what to expect at the visit. Check how time alone with the clinician, parent involvement and access to visit notes will work. That gives you something clear to discuss with your teen beforehand.

5. Leave with a next step. Who will arrange the next appointment or make a referral? Who can you contact if you have questions or things get harder while you wait?

For example

You have noticed that your teen has missed three club meetings they usually enjoy. They tell you they have been awake for much of the night. You write down both and ask, "How soon should they be seen, and what would be helpful while we wait?" Their words and your observations both give the clinician a place to start.

If you are worried about safety

If your teen's behavior is unsafe or they talk about harming themselves or someone else, seek help immediately rather than waiting for the appointment. In immediate danger, contact emergency services or seek emergency care. If you are unsure how urgent the concern is, contact a health professional promptly.

Learn more: NIMH: Children and Mental Health | AAP: One-on-One Time With the Pediatrician

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Your planning page

Bring your notes to the appointment, or ask the office how to send them securely.

1. What have I noticed, and what has my teen told me?

When did it start, and how has daily life changed?

2. What is still going well? What else might be useful to mention?

Include current care or other information the office has requested.

3. What would my teen like to ask or discuss?

Some of this may be a private conversation with the clinician.

4. What would I like to ask?

Care options, privacy, waiting for appointments and changes that need prompt help.

5. What happens next?

Who will contact whom, and when? What should we do while waiting?

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