



Taking the first steps to getting any issues assessed and finding someone who can offer support can be difficult, not only for the young person, but also for their families, parents, or care-givers. Here is a quick guide to helping your child or teenager to access the support they need.

1. How do I know if my child needs to see someone?

- You know your child best. If you become aware of any changes in your child, such as problems with sleeping, changes to their appetite, behavioural changes such as sudden emotional outbursts or withdrawing socially in situations they were previously comfortable in, refusing to go to school or participating in activities they previously enjoyed, then it might be worth getting some support for them.
- Your relationship with your child is central to their wellbeing. Decades of research into parenting and attachment theory (a good summary can be found [here](#)) has shown that how we care for our kids, show our emotions, and demonstrate communication has a significant impact on our children and our relationships with them. If we believe that something may be going on for them, then it is up to us to start that conversation. Talk about mental health openly with your child, be honest about what you've noticed, and ask them more about it. LISTEN to your child and empathise with what they're going through. They need to feel understood, and not have their concerns or their emotions dismissed or minimised. [Headspace](#) has a bunch of great resources for parents and carers supporting a young person experiencing mental health issues, including how to approach talking to them about their mental health.
- Support your child or teenager to see the potential benefits of seeing a psychologist or mental health professional. These can include having a space where they can talk confidentially about anything they want (within the limits of safety, of course!), and where they can learn and practice new skills, such as problem-solving strategies and managing their mental health.

2. How do I find the right therapist for my kid?

- There are many ways of finding a psychologist or mental health professional who will be the right “fit” for your child. Your GP is always a great place to start, as they should be familiar with the psychologists in your local area and can often give recommendations. Searching online for therapists can also be useful, or using a directory such as the “find a psychologist” page on the Australian Association of Psychologists’ [website](#). Make sure to include search terms that are relevant to your child, e.g. “anxiety”, “bullying”, or “ADHD assessment”.
- Read through the profile of the prospective psychologist to get a feel for what they might be like. Their profile on their website should describe how they work, their qualifications and training, and the mental health issues they work with.
- When you book in for your child’s first session, attend the session with them. The psychologist or mental health professional may want information about your child’s developmental history and may want to get your perspectives on what could be happening with your child right now. You may want to ask them questions, or speak to them about specific concerns, so it may be useful to write these down beforehand and bring them along.
- Your child’s therapist should make you feel included in your child’s treatment. How this occurs can vary depending on how the psychologist prefers to work but could involve having you collaborate with them and your child to set goals at the beginning of therapy, and then the therapist providing you with updates on your child’s progress. It could also include instructions on how to support your child with practicing tasks or completing activities between sessions. Most therapy sessions run for 50-60 minutes, and it is usual in many practices, including my own, to have a quick catch up with parents and carers at either the beginning or the end of the session. You may also be able to book “parent sessions” with your child’s therapist.
- Remember that if you or your child are not comfortable or happy with the psychologist or mental health professional, or the way they are doing therapy, you can stop sessions or change therapists at any time. It is useful for your child to attend two to three sessions however, to see if the therapist is a good fit for them, and to decide if you’re happy with the way they work together. Mental health treatment can be a long process in some cases, and the first few sessions are often solely dedicated to building a strong therapeutic relationship with the young person.

3. What is the process for getting my child assessed or into therapy?

- Once you have found a psychologist or mental health professional that you and your child or teenager are wanting to engage with, you may want to inquire about their fee structure. You can ask them what their fees are, and whether you may be entitled to a discounted rate (e.g. if you have a pensioner concession card or similar). You can also check to see if Medicare or private health insurance rebates can be claimed on the session fees.
- In order to claim Medicare rebates, your child will need to see their GP to have a Mental Health Treatment Plan (MHTP) completed. Until the end of 2022, a MHTP allows a person to access up to 20 Medicare rebated sessions in the calendar year (after 2022, the number of allowable sessions may be reduced by the government, but our association hopes not). Check with the therapist about the rebate amount, as it varies between professions.
- Assessments for mental health conditions such as ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder, or intelligence testing, are not covered under Medicare. You may need to shop around for psychologists or psychiatrists who can perform these assessments and compare prices. Please note that your child does not always need an assessment in order to access therapy or support.
- Your preferred psychologist or mental health professional may have a waitlist. If this is the case, talk to the practice about how long the expected wait time would be, and whether they are aware of any other practices in the local area who may be able to see your child quicker. Most practices will be aware of other psychologists or therapists in the area who may also be able to support your child, and can refer you to them.

4. How can I support my child to get the most out of therapy?

- Be proactive in asking questions and giving feedback. As a parent or carer, it is important to be involved in helping your child to get the kind of support they need.
- But don't be too pushy. This is your child's space and that needs to be respected. While you may have the right to inquire about progress, the therapist will also need to respect your young person's right to confidentiality (within the limits of safety). Ensure your child has privacy, especially if the session is via Telehealth (phone or video conferencing).

4. How can I support my child to get the most out of therapy?

- Be available. If you have a younger child or adolescent, coming to each session to drop them off or pick them up will give you opportunities to have a quick and informal chat with the therapist, and may give the therapist opportunity to request a more formal phone call or parent session. If your child's session is via telehealth, helping your child set it up at the beginning and then asking the therapist when they want you to come back is a great way of being available but not helicoptering.
- Be curious about what your child or young person got out of their sessions. Ask them if they had any activities to complete, or what the "take away" message was. They may not want to talk about it immediately, as they may need time to process the session, so find a nice quiet time later on to have that conversation.
- Notice your own reactions to your child, their mental health, and their therapy. If you find that your own anxiety or stress levels are rising, or it is bringing up something uncomfortable in you, it might be useful to find your own therapist to speak with.

While the initial stages of seeking help can feel daunting, your GP and your child's psychologist will help you every step of the way. Investing in the mental wellbeing of our young people is very important. We all need a little help from time to time and it is important that we normalise seeking expert help when this is needed for our kids, just the way you would see a doctor for any physical concerns or illnesses. If we as parents support our children and young people to access therapy early on, and help them to get the most out of their therapy experiences, they will be able to build resilience and coping skills which can last a lifetime, and have strategies to prevent mental health concerns deteriorating in the future.

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