

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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The Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

The child and adolescent psychiatrist is a physician who specializes in the diagnosis and the treatment of disorders of thinking, feeling and/or behavior affecting children, adolescents, and their families. A child and adolescent psychiatrist offers families the advantages of a medical education, the medical traditions of professional ethics, and medical responsibility for providing comprehensive care.

Practice

The child and adolescent psychiatrist uses a knowledge of biological, psychological, and social factors in working with patients. Initially, a comprehensive diagnostic examination is performed to evaluate the current problem with attention to its physical, genetic, developmental, emotional, cognitive, educational, family, peer, and social components. The child and adolescent psychiatrist arrives at a diagnosis and diagnostic formulation which are shared with the patient and family. The child and adolescent psychiatrist then designs a treatment plan which considers all the components and discusses these recommendations with the child or adolescent and family.

An integrated approach may involve individual, group or family psychotherapy; medication; and/or consultation with other physicians or professionals from schools, juvenile courts, social agencies or other community organizations. In addition, the child psychiatrist is prepared and expected to act as an advocate for the best interests of children and adolescents. Child and adolescent psychiatrists perform consultations in a variety of settings (schools, juvenile courts, social agencies).

Training

Child and adolescent psychiatric training requires four years of medical school, at least three years of approved residency training in medicine, neurology, and general psychiatry with adults, and two years of additional specialized training in psychiatric work with children, adolescents, and their families in an accredited residency in child and adolescent psychiatry.

In the general psychiatry training years, the physician achieves competence in the fundamentals of the theory and practice of psychiatry. In the child and adolescent psychiatry training, the trainee acquires a thorough knowledge of normal child and family development, psychopathology, and treatment. Special importance is given to disorders that appear in childhood, such as pervasive developmental disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, mental retardation, mood disorders, depressive and anxiety disorders, drug dependency and delinquency (conduct disorder). The child psychiatry trainee applies and develops psychiatric skills by treating children, adolescents and their families in a variety of settings.

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An experience in consultation to other physicians, mental health professionals, schools, and community agencies is an important part of training.

Certification and Continuing Education

Having completed the child and adolescent psychiatry residency and successfully passing the certification examination in general psychiatry given by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN), the child and adolescent psychiatrist is eligible to take the additional certification examination in the subspecialty of child and adolescent psychiatry. Although the ABPN examinations are not required for practice, they are a further assurance that the child and adolescent psychiatrist with these certifications can be expected to diagnose and treat all psychiatric conditions in patients of any age competently.

The child and adolescent psychiatrist continues to study and learn about new advances by reading scientific literature and attending conferences. New knowledge is then applied to diagnostic, therapeutic, and consultative work.

Finding a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

Child and adolescent psychiatrists can be found through local medical and psychiatric societies, local mental health associations, local hospitals or medical centers, departments of psychiatry in medical schools, and national organizations like the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the American Psychiatric Association. In addition, pediatricians, family physicians, school counselors, and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) can be helpful in identifying child and adolescent psychiatrists.

See also: *Facts for Families*: #24 Know When to Seek Help for Your Child, #25 Know Where to Seek Help for Your Child, #52 Comprehensive Psychiatric Evaluation. *Your Child* (1998 Harper Collins)/*Your Adolescent* (1999 Harper Collins).

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The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 8,500 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

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