

Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*
Medication Management in Children and Adolescents
Information for Teachers

Definition

Psychiatric medications are any medications used to treat a mental health disorder (for example, ADHD, Depression). Medications under the prescription of a treating medical professional and when taken as prescribed, along with the other non-medication interventions, can be important elements in the successful treatment of psychiatric disorders. Medications can help to control symptoms, make other kinds of treatment more effective, and most importantly, may help to reduce the barriers to learning and enhance school and life success.

Some facts to know

- **Medications do not cure psychiatric disorders** – Medications may not cure psychiatric disorders, but in many cases, along with other non-medication interventions (therapy, parent and teacher support), they can help a child or adolescent function despite continuing mental distress and difficulty coping effectively.
- **Length of treatment depends on the individual and the disorder** – Some children may only need to take medication for a set time period and then never need it again, while others may have to take medication for longer periods of time.
- **Medications may not produce the same effect in everyone** – Some children may respond better to one medication than another, often due to factors such as age, sex, body size, body chemistry, physical illnesses, diets and other treatments. Some may need larger doses versus smaller doses; some may have side effects, while others may have no side effects; some may experience minimal symptom relief as opposed to having complete symptom relief.
- **Good reports from families and teachers** – Families and teachers often report that a combination of medication and therapy have allowed their child to participate in school much like other children, along with improved functioning at home.
- **Only used when benefits outweigh the risks** – Medications should be used only when the anticipated benefits outweigh the risks.
- **It is not unusual for children/adolescents to require changes in dosages** and/or medications over time. It is important to regularly monitor the impact of medications

Why do we care?

- Although many children and adolescents with mental health disorders can be very successful in life by utilizing non-medication interventions only (individual, group, or family therapy, parent and teacher support), medications may also be a factor that may help in the treatment of a mental health disorder or it may help to make these other forms of treatments more effective.
- Without proper identification and treatment, mental health disorders in childhood may have serious consequences, such as school failure, family conflicts, problems with relationships, problems developing social skills, substance abuse, delinquency, and even risk for accidental injuries and death.
- As with any intervention, a case-by-case decision-making process is necessary depending on your child's diagnosis and individual needs. The decision to medicate should be made solely by the child's parents or caregivers, and a medical professional experienced in diagnosing and treating childhood disorders.

What can we do about it?

If you are wondering if medication can help a child in your class, refer the child to a medical professional or express your concerns to the medical professional or to the child's parent/caregiver. There are several types of professionals who can diagnose and treat mental health disorders, including school psychologists, clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, nurse practitioners, neurologists, psychiatrists and pediatricians.

- **What happens next:**
 - The medical professional will meet with the child and family and a decision will be made concerning medication management.
 - The child may then begin a trial of taking the medication while being monitored closely by the parent, and the medical professional.
 - It is recommended that parents/guardians notify all caretakers (other family members, teachers, the school nurse/nurse practitioner, and others who are in charge of this child) when a child is taking medication; however, it is up to parent/guardian and the child as to whether they want to notify others. It is often helpful if others are aware so that they can also report favorable results and side effects and to also monitor the administration of the medication.
- **Your role if you are aware that a child is taking medication:**
 - Become educated on the medication if possible (see medical professional for verbal and written information that is available about the medication)
 - Monitor the child in your class. Look for side effects and favorable results.
 - If the child is taking medication in school, help to make sure the child takes the medication on the correct schedule.
 - Ask parents or medical professionals if there are any foods or drinks that the child should avoid while taking the prescribed medications.
 - Some families do not want others to know that their child is on medication for fear of rejection/teasing or labeling. Please be discrete if you are aware that a child is on medication.
 - If the school nurse is involved with the medication management, maintain a working relationship with him/her so that the child can receive the best care possible.

Key Resources/Links

1. National Institute of Mental Health – This webpage/printable booklet is designed to help mental health patients and their families understand how and why medications can be used as part of the treatment of mental health problems. It also offers a children's medication chart that lists brand and generic names of medications under each of the main childhood disorders.
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/medicate.cfm>
2. U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institute of Health (Medline Plus) – The website offers an alphabetical list of drugs, supplements, and herbal information. It also provides you with an explanation of why this medication is prescribed, how this medicine should be used, precautions, side effects, storage conditions for the medicine, brand names, and other important information.
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html>
3. The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools – Psychotropic Drugs and Children: Use, Trends, and Implications for Schools. This brochure discusses the use of psychotropic medications specific to the school population.
<http://www.healthinschools.org/Health-in-Schools/Health-Services/School->

[Health-Services/School-Health-Issues/ADD/Psychotropic-Drugs-and-Children.aspx](#)

4. American Academy of child and Adolescent Psychiatry – These articles discuss psychiatric medication for children and adolescents specific to how medications are used, types of medications, and questions to ask when becoming educated on medication management.
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/psychmed.htm> and
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/29.htm> and
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/medquest.htm>
5. National Institute of Mental Health (Your Child and Medication) – This article tells parents what you need to know about your child’s medications.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0651/is_2000_Feb_3/ai_70363309
6. Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) – This website offers information detailed information regarding AD/HD; however this link is specific to medication management for children with AD/HD.
<http://www.chadd.org>
7. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) – This article is specific to antidepressant medication management for children and adolescents with depression. http://www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/antidepressant_child.cfm
8. **The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD)** - seeks to increase research and greater public understanding and awareness of the needs of children and adults with mental illness and emotional disorders. www.mhamd.org

**Developed by the Center for School Mental Health (<http://csmh.umaryland.edu>) in collaboration with the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance.*