

# FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 52

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## COMPREHENSIVE PSYCHIATRIC EVALUATION

Evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist is appropriate for any child or adolescent with emotional and/or behavioral problems. Most children and adolescents with serious emotional and behavioral problems need a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation.

Comprehensive psychiatric evaluations usually require several hours over one or more office visits for the child and parents. With the parents' permission, other significant people (such as the family physician, school personnel or other relatives) may be contacted for additional information.

The comprehensive evaluation frequently includes the following:

- Description of present problems and symptoms
- Information about health, illness and treatment (both physical and psychiatric), including current medications
- Parent and family health and psychiatric histories
- Information about the child's development
- Information about school and friends
- Information about family relationships
- Interview of the child or adolescent
- Interview of parents/guardians
- If needed, laboratory studies such as blood tests, x-rays, or special assessments (for example, psychological, educational, speech and language evaluation)

The child and adolescent psychiatrist then develops a formulation. The formulation describes the child's problems and explains them in terms that the parents and child can understand. The formulation combines biological, psychological and social parts of the problem with developmental needs, history and strengths of the child, adolescent and family.

Time is made available to answer the parents' and child's questions. Parents often come to such evaluations with many concerns, including:

- Is my child normal? Am I normal? Am I to blame?
- Am I silly to worry?
- Can you help us? Can you help my child?
- What is wrong? What is the diagnosis?

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- Does my child need additional assessment and/or testing (medical, psychological etc.)?
- What are your recommendations? How can the family help?
- Does my child need treatment? Do I need treatment?
- What will treatment cost, and how long will it take?

Parents are often worried about how they will be viewed during the evaluation. Child and adolescent psychiatrists are there to support families and to be a partner, not to judge or blame. They listen to concerns, and help the child or adolescent and his/her family define the goals of the evaluation. Parents should always ask for explanations of words or terms they do not understand.

When a treatable problem is identified, recommendations are provided and a specific treatment plan is developed. Child and adolescent psychiatrists are specifically trained and skilled in conducting comprehensive psychiatric evaluations with children, adolescents and families.

For additional information see *Facts for Families*:

#24 When to Seek Help for Your Child,

#25 Where to Seek Help for Your Child,

#26 Your Health Insurance Benefits, and

#42 The Continuum of Care.

See also: *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 7,000 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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