



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN PEDIATRIC PRIMARY CARE

Effective Strategies for Communication

Recognize Barriers

Understand why behavioral health concerns are often not addressed in primary care settings.

- There are various reasons clinicians and families may not bring up behavioral health concerns in primary care. However, primary care may be the only access to medical care patients have, and through early identification and intervention, primary care providers can significantly impact their patients' health.

See Similarities

Recognize similarities between behavioral health concerns and other pediatric concerns.

- Signaling that it's okay to talk about mental health is one of the most powerful things you can do.
- Ask for "anything else," "can you tell me what you mean by," and follow-up on hints.

Involve All & Set Expectations

Learn communication strategies to encourage the involvement of all parties and set expectations for the visit.

- Involving everyone is more likely to lead to better adherence to treatment and higher satisfaction with visits.
- Set expectations for what to expect during the appointment.
 - "We have 15 minutes today. We may fill out some forms and do some physical exams. Then we can talk about our plan. How does that sound?"
- Make sure both the patient and caregiver have opportunities to respond.

Elicit Concerns & Make a Plan

Learn how to elicit all concerns and partner with the patient and family to make a plan to address them.

- Develop a list of concerns by asking open-ended questions and seeking input from all parties.
 - "Tell me more" and "Is there anything else troubling you that we might want to talk about?"
- Make a plan: Summarize their concerns and ask for confirmation.
 - "Is that correct?"
 - "Which seems most important?"
- Validate, ask what they have tried, and ask for permission to give recommendations.
 - "That's a great start! Do you mind if I make some suggestions too?"
 - "It can be hard! Would it be okay if I offered some suggestions that might help?"

Additional resources:

- Binder, J. (2013). Primary care interviewing learning through role play. Springer New York.
- Allmand, B. W., Buckman, W., & Gofman, H. F. (1979). The family is the patient: An approach to behavioral pediatrics for the clinician. Mosby.

Remember, patients and families trust you and appreciate when you initiate conversations about behavioral health.

