



Better Office Visits

Parent/ caregiver guide

Open communication between parents or other caregivers and their child's pediatrician is essential for optimal care. Here are some questions to ask your pediatrician or primary care provider when you have behavior concerns:

How do you handle referrals?

Depending on how your child's primary medical care is arranged, your provider may not be well integrated with other healthcare services. Are you comfortable addressing behavioral concerns during routine school physicals or other appointments? Be sure you understand whether a specialist referral is needed for behavioral concerns that warrant further review and treatment.

What will you want to know from a specialist?

Behavior specialists sometimes struggle with knowing how much information to report to primary care providers after they begin treating the patient. To your comfort level, instruct your child's specialist to keep clear lines of communication open to the primary care provider.

What common issues may need to be addressed by primary care and behavioral specialists?

Issues with sleep or eating, medications, pain, sensory impairment, or chronic health conditions.

Sleep

Children with autism, intellectual, and/or other disabilities have a significantly higher incidence of sleep disorders than children in the general population. Medications and chronic health conditions also cause sleep disturbances. Sleep disorders include nightmares, night terrors, obstructive sleep apnea, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), bedwetting, and periodic limb movement disorder.

Diet/Nutrition

Addressing dietary deficiencies can help improve overall health, including behavioral health.

Pain

Pain can result in emotional and behavioral issues, including attention issues, aggression, and emotional distress. This is particularly challenging in children who struggle with verbal communication.

Sensory Impairments

Particularly in children with vision, auditory, or other sensory impairments, understanding and assessing these challenges in the context of behavior is essential. For example, the lack of melatonin production in a child who is blind may be helped by melatonin supplements to resolve a sleep disturbance that is causing challenging behaviors.

Medications

Behavioral side effects of medications are more common than most people realize, so it's important to keep both primary care physicians and behavioral specialists informed of prescription and over-the-counter medications.

What are the critical warning signs I should share with the team?

- Loss of milestones/skills (leading to behavior regression, substance abuse disorders, degenerative disorders)
- Rapid onset/progression
- Lack of response to intervention
- Head size two standard deviations above or below average
- Weight loss, or rapid weight gain
- Severe fatigue
- Recurrent infections
- Muscle weakness
- Problems sitting or standing

Can you see us more frequently?

When a child is being seen for behavioral health concerns, they may benefit from quarterly, rather than annual, primary care visits to assess how therapies are going and what other needs are present. If exams are challenging, there will be a shorter time between visits, which can help identify the need for a referral for hearing, vision, dental, or other concerns.

It's summer break: Do we still need medication?

Behavioral medications can be helpful in more situations than school. During summertime, many students are dealing with boredom or may be feeling isolated from friends, so it's important to continually check in with the provider team on medications and dosages.



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