# How to Find a Therapist

For parents and caregivers of children with medical conditions

Being the parent or caregiver of a child with a medical condition can be very stressful. Some medical experiences you have with your child may be traumatic. As many as **1 in 5 adults has a mental health concern** like depression, anxiety, or posttraumatic stress disorder [1]. The chance that you will experience a mental health concern increases when you have a child with a medical condition. It can be hard to find the time or resources to take care of your mental health, but taking care of yourself is important for both your wellbeing and your child's.

A therapist can help you manage stress, worries, sadness, anger, grief, and more. Therapists are licensed mental health professionals who can listen to your concerns and help you solve problems. Therapists can teach you strategies that help you manage difficult emotions, thoughts, and memories. Therapists can also help you to improve communication with your loved ones or work through problems in your relationships. The steps below can help you find a therapist.

As you follow these steps, remember that deciding to find a therapist is a big step! It can feel scary, and you may feel like you don't have time to put your needs first. But, it is worth it.

#### **STEP 1: FIND OPTIONS**

There are multiple types of therapists, including psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, licensed professional counselors, and psychiatrists (though psychiatrists most often focus on medication management). They each have slightly different training, but all have a common goal of working with you to support your mental health. To find a good therapist, start by finding out your options. Here are some ways you can start:



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- Search online. You can use websites such as <u>FindTreatment.SAMHSA.gov</u>, <u>Locator.APA.org</u>, or <u>PsychologyToday.com</u> to find therapists in your area.
- 2. **Ask around.** Ask friends and family if they have recommendations. Ask other parents and caregivers you know who have dealt with similar experiences, as well as members of your child's care team such as a social worker or psychologist. You should also ask your primary care doctor or other trusted professionals that may have a recommendation.
- 3. **Call your insurance company or go to their website.** Your insurance company can tell you what mental health services are covered by your insurance plan, and which specific therapists are covered. Call the phone number on the back of your insurance card or visit the website on your card to learn who is covered by your insurance. Your employer may also have an Employee Assistance Program that provides mental health care.
- 4. **Call your local health department or go to their website.** In most areas, there are low-cost, community mental health services. Ask your local health department for more information.

This handout was created by Dana Bakula, PhD, with input from the Caregiver Wellbeing Outreach Subcommittee and caregivers who generously donated their time to provide feedback. [1] Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2016.

# How to Find a Therapist Continued...

#### **STEP 2: ASK QUESTIONS**

**Not all therapists have the same training or expertise**. Ask questions before deciding to work with a specific therapist. You can ask to have a phone consultation before scheduling a visit or ask questions during your first appointment to help decide if this is the right therapist for you. You may talk with a few therapists before you find the right fit, and that is okay!

**Ask about their expertise.** Ask about their qualifications and experience. Do they use strategies supported by research (these are also called "evidence-based" strategies)?

- Are you a licensed therapist and how long have you been licensed?
- What experiences do you have with my specific concerns?
- Are you familiar with caregivers of children with medical conditions?
- What treatments do you use? Have they been proven to help with feelings I might experience like depression, anxiety, anger, or grief?

Ask about their policies. How well do their policies meet your needs as a parent/caregiver?

- What are your fees, and do you take my insurance? If you don't take my insurance, do you have a sliding scale fee system to help lower the cost?
- What are your cancellation policies? Are they flexible if I need to cancel because my child is hospitalized or has a medical appointment?
- Are you willing to speak to someone on my child's medical team or spend time learning about my child's condition and what it takes to manage it?
- Do you offer telehealth visits? Do you have evening or weekend hours?

## **STEP 3: MAKE AN APPOINTMENT**

Once you find one (or more) good options, choose a therapist and **make an appointment!** If none of the therapists you found have openings, consider joining the waitlist for multiple therapists.

### WHILE YOU WAIT FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT ...

Talk to your loved ones about how you are feeling and find small ways to get support, such as a phone call with a friend, support with childcare, and working on getting regular sleep and nutrition. You can also dial "988" to be connected with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, or text with a trained counselor through the Crisis Text line by texting "MHA" to 741-741.

**LEARN MORE** The Caregiver Wellbeing Special Interest Group is a group of mental health professionals dedicated to the promotion of wellbeing for caregivers. Interested in learning more? Check out our website. Follow us on social media for updates and evidence-based caregiver wellbeing tips. @ @CaregiverWellbeingSPP 2 @CaregiverSIGSPP div54cwsig.wixsite.com/caregiverwellbeing



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