



Mental Health Assessment: A Guide for Families/Whānau

It is not uncommon for children & young people to develop mental health problems at sometime in their lives. Often a change in behaviour or mood, difficulties at home, school, work or with friends may provide clues that some thing is not quite right. If you have concerns about your child or young person you might approach their doctor for help. The doctor may make a referral, for a Mental Health Assessment, to a Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service, which is free, or to a private psychologist, counsellor or psychotherapist which will cost you.

Referrals to these services can also be made by school guidance counsellors, doctors & other health professionals & to some services by family/whānau.

This Information Sheet refers mainly to a Mental Health Assessment at a Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service.

What is a Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service?

A Mental Health Service which works with any child or young person, between the ages of 0 – 19 years, considered to have a moderate to severe emotional, psychological or behavioural problem. If a problem is assessed as mild, the child or young person & their family/whānau will be referred to a more appropriate service such as a school counsellor, a community agency or back to their own doctor.

A Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service employs a lot of different staff which may include:

- Administration Staff
- Child & Adolescent Psychiatrists
 - Child Psychotherapists
 - Clinical Psychologists
- Cultural Support Workers
 - Family Therapists
- Mental Health Nurses
- Occupational Therapists
 - Paediatricians
 - Play Therapists
 - Social Workers

Where is the Assessment Done?

The Assessment usually takes place at the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service but some services will see a child or young person at school, in their home or somewhere else in the community. Different services vary on how long it may take for the first appointment; however, if there is an emergency there is a crisis service that will see the child or young person that same day.

Who Attends the Assessment?

The child or young person has the right to have their family/whānau, caregivers or other support people with them. Cultural supports will be available for the child or young person & their family/whānau and language interpreters can be arranged where English is not the first language.

What does the Assessment involve?

The aim of the Assessment is to understand the child or young person's problems & what might be affecting them. An example of some questions asked could be:

- What are the main concerns & worries?
- How is the child or young person managing at home or school?
- What are relationships like with other family/whānau & friends?
- Are there any stresses affecting the child or young person?

Information about their early life & development is important to build a picture of the child or young person.

Sometimes, the child or young person & their family/whānau are seen separately so they can each have an opportunity to talk openly with the clinician. Younger children might be seen in a specially set-up playroom, containing toys, paints & activities. It may help to use toys or painting to explain their worries & how they feel.

All information obtained during the Assessment is written down & kept in a clinical file. This information is confidential & can only be released with the permission of the child or young person (see 'What are the rights of young people & families' below). The only reason confidentiality is not followed is if there is concern that the child may be at risk of harm or other people may be at risk of harm.

What Happens after the Assessment?

At the end of the Assessment the clinician will provide a summary of what they believe is going on & ideas about what may help. This may include:

No further follow-up: Some children or young people do not need to continue to be seen by a specialist mental health service, for example if they are found not to have any mental health problems or if their behaviour & emotional reactions are normal for their current stresses or situation. The child or young person & their family/whānau may be provided with information or advice on how to help their child deal with any stresses such as bullying & problems within the family or at school.

Referral to another Agency: Other agencies may have services that are more appropriate for the child or young person (such as the treatment of psychological difficulties relating to sexual abuse).

Continuing with the Service: If the child or young person meets the criteria for a moderate to severe mental health problem, then they & their family/whānau will be offered on-going treatment and support.

With consent, a letter is usually written to the doctor or referrer to advise them an assessment has taken place.

what are the rights of children or young people & their Family/Whānau?

All children, young people and their family/whānau should receive a brochure or written information outlining the service and what it offers. There will also be a pamphlet on consumer rights regarding their child or young person. This includes the right to:

- Be treated with respect.
- Be fully informed
- Informed choice & give informed consent
- To support from family/whānau & others.

If family/whānau are dissatisfied with their child or young person's treatment or feel they are not being heard then it is important to contact the manager of the service & discuss this with them.

You can also contact an advocate from a family support service (see below) or contact the complaints person at the mental health service. This information should be provided when you get to the service but you can request this from the service at any time.

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Links:

Supporting Families in Mental Illness New Zealand

Provide education, advocacy & support for family/whānau of people experiencing a mental illness. The site has a list of branches throughout New Zealand & their contact details:

<http://www.supportingfamiliesnz.org.nz/>

Health & Disability Commission

For information, rights & advocacy:

<http://www.hdc.org.nz/about-us/mental-health-and-addictions>