

Medications may be useful in treating symptoms of pediatric mental health conditions. In most cases medications are used along with evidence based psychosocial treatments. Discuss all medications child's treatment team (doctor, pharmacist, and therapist). Additional resources can be found at www.utahpips.org/upop.

Principles Regarding the Use of Psychotropic Medications in Children and Adolescents

Medication can be an effective part of the treatment for several psychiatric disorders of childhood and adolescence. The physician or advanced practice professional who recommends medication should have experience treating psychiatric illnesses in children and adolescents. He or she should fully explain the reasons for recommending medication, what benefits the medication should provide, as well as possible risks, adverse effects, and other treatment alternatives.

Psychiatric medication should be used as part of a comprehensive plan of treatment, with ongoing medical assessment and, in most cases, individual and/or family psychotherapy. Medications which have beneficial effects may also have side effects, ranging from mildly annoying to very serious. There may be tests requested to help the prescriber monitor for adverse side effects.

General Considerations for Psychotropic Medications:

1. Start with evidence-based psychosocial treatment before medication is considered. Ideally, 12 weeks before using medication.
2. Psychiatric treatment should include a trauma-informed approach when providing medication.
3. Except in rare cases, only one medication should be started at a time. Most children, especially young children rarely need more than one psychotropic medication.
4. Start medications at low doses and increase dose slowly, using the lowest effective medication dose.
5. Continue psychosocial treatment during treatment with medication.
6. Sleep is an important part of a child and adolescent's ability to manage stress and their emotions. Utilize good sleep practices also known as sleep hygiene.
7. Antipsychotics should be used with caution, and for a limited number if diagnosis. There is little evidence that 2 antipsychotics are better than one.
8. Monitor for adverse effects of medications.



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9. Routine monitoring is important during the course of medication. Some monitoring requires blood testing. It is very important to ensure the blood tests are completed when ordered by the prescriber. Attending regular follow up visits is important in order for the prescriber to monitor how a child is responding to the medication and evaluate for adverse effects.
10. After 6-9 months of stability the prescriber should evaluate the child and attempt to lower the dose and work to discontinue the medication.
11. Never stop or change a medication with out speaking to the child's prescriber.

Resources:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP):

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Psychiatric-Medication-For-Children-And-Adolescents-Part-I-How-Medications-Are-Used-021.aspx

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Questions to Ask

Medication can be an important part of treatment for some psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents. Psychiatric medication should only be used as one part of a comprehensive treatment plan. Ongoing evaluation and monitoring by a physician is essential. Parents and guardians should be provided with complete information when psychiatric medication is recommended. Children and adolescents should be included in appropriate parts of the discussion about medications, using words they understand. By asking questions, including those that follow, children, adolescents, and their parents will gain a better understanding of psychiatric medications:

1. What is the name of the medication? Is it known by other names?
2. How will the medication help my child? When will it start to work?
3. What side effects commonly occur with this medication?
4. Is this medication addictive? Can it be abused?
5. What is the recommended dosage? How often will the medication be taken?
6. Are there any laboratory tests (e.g. heart tests, blood test, etc.) which need to be done before my child begins taking the medication? Will any tests need to be done while my child is taking the medication?
7. How often will progress be checked and by whom? Will dose changes be necessary?
8. Are there any other medications or foods which my child should avoid while taking the medication?
9. Are there interactions between this medication and other medications (prescription and/or over-the-counter) my child is taking?
10. Are there any activities that my child should avoid while taking the medication? Are any precautions recommended for other activities?
11. How long will my child need to take this medication? How will the decision be made to stop this medication?
12. What do I do if a problem develops (e.g. if my child becomes ill, doses are missed, or side effects develop)?
13. Does my child's school nurse need to be informed about this medication?

Treatment with psychiatric medications is a serious matter for parents, children, and adolescents. Parents should ask these questions before their child or adolescent starts taking psychiatric medications. Parents and children/adolescents need to be fully informed about medications. If, after asking these questions, parents still have serious questions or doubts about medication treatment, they should feel free to ask for a second opinion by a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

Resources:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Psychiatric-Medication-For-Children-And-Adolescents-Part-III-Questions-To-Ask-051.aspx