

# Getting Answers to Your Mental Health Questions

## How to Talk with Mental Health Professionals

Talking about mental health might seem awkward or difficult at times. But it is a critical part of everyone’s health and well-being. It’s also more common than you might think – about half of teens aged 13–18 will experience a challenge with mental well-being at some point in their lives.<sup>1</sup> The good news – there are doctors and other mental health professionals who are there to support us.

Do you need support or have questions about mental health? These tips can help start the conversation.



Are there medications that might help me feel better? What can I do to manage my symptoms besides taking medication?

I’ve been feeling really stressed lately. What can I do to help that?

Things have been difficult lately, and I’ve been smoking weed to get through it. Is that okay?



If my parents have a mental illness, does that mean I will?

How can I deal with my social anxiety?



Could the ways I eat or sleep be contributing to my feelings of depression?

What are good resources for learning about teen mental illness?



Write down three things you want to ask a mental health professional:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup>Merikangas, K. R., He, J. P., Burstein, M., Swanson, S. A., Avenevoli, S., Cui, L., Benjet, C., Georgiades, K., & Swendsen, J. (2010). Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders in U.S. adolescents: results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication—Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A). *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49(10), 980–989.

## How do I find a mental health professional to talk with?

When you're talking about your mental health, it is important that you find a professional who makes you feel safe and supported. Here are some tips for finding someone you can talk with:



- Start by talking with your parent, guardian, or another trusted adult. If you have health insurance, they should be able to help you get a list of providers who are covered.
- Ask for a recommendation or referral from your primary care provider.
- You can also talk with other family members or friends about professionals they like. You can ask your school counselor for a recommendation.
- Search the internet for nonprofit, government, or mental health organizations in your area. Use search terms like “counselors,” “psychologists,” “psychiatrists,” “mental health agencies,” or “social service organizations.”
- Use the [American Psychological Association’s Psychologist Locator](#) to find a mental health provider near you who has skills in the issues you want to discuss. You could also add “near me” or “for teens” to your search. Use the filters to help you narrow your search. For example, you can find a provider of a particular gender, age, ethnicity, or religion. You can also search for one who speaks a particular language.

[Learn about different types of mental health providers](#) and what each one does. Some can prescribe medication, and some cannot.



- Doctors (with Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degrees), physician assistants, and some psychiatric-mental health nurses can prescribe medication.



- Most psychologists, licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs), licensed professional counselors (LPCs), or licensed clinical professional counselors (LCPCs) cannot prescribe medication.

## Keep in mind:

- **Specialty:** It's best to see a professional who specializes in your main area of need. If you are struggling with anxiety, try to find a mental health professional who specializes in anxiety disorders.
- **Severity:** Your primary care provider will be able to tell you more about any symptoms you are experiencing. They may recommend that you see a psychiatrist, psychologist, or both.
- **Health insurance coverage:** Your insurance provider or Medicaid may have a list of providers they cover. They may only cover certain types of mental health providers and may limit the number of visits.



## How do I talk with mental health professionals?

Talking about your mental health with a professional is a great first step in getting the help you need. Take control of your mental health by using these tips to guide you before, during, and after your visit.

### Confidentiality

If you are under 18, your parent or guardian will likely be able to see your medical records. But your therapist can set up an agreement with your parents allowing the therapist to keep your information private. The law requires your therapist to contact child protective services if you reveal that you or someone is in danger. Laws about confidentiality are different in each state.



### Before your visit

Prepare ahead of your visit.

- Write down your questions.
- Make a list of your medications.
- Ask your parent for information about your family health history.

### During your visit

Use the notes you made about your questions and concerns to guide the conversation.

- Be open and honest. Describe your symptoms, and how frequent or severe they are.
- Ask your doctor or health professional to repeat or explain anything you did not understand.

### After your visit

- Schedule a follow-up appointment if your health professional suggested you make one.
- Think about how satisfied you were after the visit. It's okay to look for a second opinion or another provider if you didn't feel comfortable with the services.
- Follow any suggestions your provider made for things you can read or do at home! Here are some [resources](#) you may also find helpful.