

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM Your Child's School in Children's Mental Health

Mental health conditions can interfere with a child's learning. The role of the school is to ensure that all students, including children with mental health issues have equitable access to learning opportunities, and to help them succeed educationally to the best of their abilities. Parents can play a vital role in the education of their children by working in partnership with the professionals to develop a plan that maximizes their child's abilities to succeed at school.

What Parents Can Do

- ✦ Try to establish regular ongoing contact and not just when a crisis arises. Expect you will have regular contact. Be proactive and let the school know your preferences for how you will communicate with them.
- ✦ When you meet with the school to review your child's progress, begin the meeting with things that are going well, as well as the concerns. It is important to look at what has been working. Put together some notes (positive feedback first, then concerns) and bring to the meeting. This will relieve some anxiety and help you be prepared going into the meeting.
- ✦ If you have noticed something in your child's behaviour that is troubling, it is a good idea to contact the school to find out whether their school work or social interaction with the other children is also being affected.
- ✦ It is best if you can start by contacting your child's teacher as they are the one who knows your child the best. The school counsellor is also a good contact and parents can request to meet with them. The school principal is a good resource and may be able to pull together appropriate staff members to talk with you about your child, but is usually not the person who knows your child the best.
- ✦ Be aware of everything that is in your child's file. If there is anything you do not have a copy of and which you would like, do ask the school if they could please provide one. Offer to pick up the copy at a later date, so it can be copied during a quiet part of the day. This is especially important if you would like copies of more than one report or if the reports are long.
- ✦ Get to know and understand your rights and all the terms and conditions that apply to the services your child and family use. Read everything carefully. Be sure you understand and fully agree to everything before you commit to, or sign anything.
- ✦ Once a child has involvement with a service provider outside of the school, an integrated case management (ICM) meeting is often required and parents, as well as schools, can request an ICM meeting. These meetings bring together everyone involved in assisting your child.
- ✦ It is advisable to bring a third party with you to the meeting, to be an extra set of ears for you, and to take notes. It is recommended that you inform the school ahead of time that you will be bringing an additional person.

What Parents Need From Schools

- ✦ To be treated with courtesy, consideration and respect for the job they are attempting to do. Appreciation for the expertise that parents have gained from bringing up their child and living with them.
- ✦ To be fully involved in the assessment and planning; the goal being to develop a plan for the day-to-day management of the child and to prevent situations from reaching a crisis point.
- ✦ Information that is explained in plain language that doesn't cause parents more stress by needing to ask what things mean.



MORE ON WHAT TO EXPECT



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What Schools Can Do

- ✧ Because of different stressors and expectations at school, the child will often behave differently at school. The school may contact the parents because they are seeing a problem that may not be evident at home. This is an opportunity for both school and parents to work together on the child's behalf.
- ✧ When teachers first notice a problem, they will often consult with the parents and attempt strategies to manage the behaviour or support the student in the classroom. If these prove unsuccessful, the teacher may seek assistance from other school-based services.
- ✧ If a classroom teacher finds effective ways to help a student, it may not be necessary to investigate further. However, if your child continues to experience significant academic, social, or emotional difficulties that interfere with learning, it is usually a good idea for the family and school to meet to discuss next steps.
- ✧ A behavioural assessment may be administered which will provide a better understanding of the function and the patterns of your child's behaviour. You may be asked to contribute information about your child's behaviour at home. This provides important information needed for developing an appropriate plan of support.
- ✧ If there is a meeting required with the school, it may include the teacher, principal, school counsellor, and possibly other school personnel such as the special education assistant, etc. to discuss the difficulties they are experiencing with the child. These meetings sometimes result in recommendations being made for the child to be referred to a specialist and/or the local Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) Center for assessment. It may also be appropriate at this stage to have families involve their physician or pediatrician to rule out any other health problems.
- ✧ The teachers at your child's school can provide you with valuable information about how your child behaves at school and about his or her academic performance. With this information, families are able to develop a more complete understanding of their child.
- ✧ A recommendation for psycho-educational testing may be made to help identify any learning problems. It could be a learning disability that's making it very difficult for them to understand expectations or read the social cues and that can create a lot of anxiety, a lot of stress on the child.
- ✧ If your child is given a special education designation, the school will work with you to develop an individualized education plan (IEP) that will provide accommodations and interventions designed specifically around your child's needs. All schools have access to a Support Services (or Special Education) teacher who can help with the case management for the IEP.

What Schools Need From Parents

- ✧ To be treated with courtesy, consideration, and respect for the job they are attempting to do.
- ✧ A description of the child's personality, strengths, likes, dislikes, struggles etc. Information on what the child is saying about school, their friends, things they are struggling with, things they are happy with and enjoying. Strategies used at home for setting limits, for encouraging the child, for giving the child safe time. A common message and approach at home and school are very important for the child.
- ✧ To ensure privacy when talking about a child's difficulties, teachers can be more helpful if parents make an appointment or give the teacher a note. This helps to prevent other children or parents from overhearing any conversations you need to have with the teacher.
- ✧ A team effort where everyone is respectful and mindful of the need to agree on a plan of action and agree to adjust the plan if necessary.
- ✧ Access to other reports, assessments, information that parents have that may help the school in understanding and managing the child.

The F.O.R.C.E.

Families Organized for Recognition and Care Equality
Society for Kids' Mental Health

