

## MINISTRY FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT: CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

It's not uncommon for young children to decide they don't want to go to bed, or they don't want to eat something their parents really want them to eat. Sometimes they're just feeling out of sorts and will throw a tantrum either at home or out in public. While these behaviours are challenging to varying degrees, they're not abnormal. But for the families of 1 out of every 7 children and youth in BC, the challenge is much greater. These are children who struggle with mental health difficulties.

### HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR IS ABNORMAL?

If your child is not coping and is acting out, and if the behaviour is extreme and/or prolonged, he or she may have mental health difficulties.

Some examples include when children:

- can't or won't go to sleep and stay awake for several days
- refuse to vary what they eat, or consistently eat dirt
- are pulling their hair out
- completely isolate themselves at preschool and refuse to interact with any other children or else just sit and throw things at others, and the teachers are unable to find a solution
- are constantly physically aggressive or violent towards others
- try to harm themselves
- have severe separation anxiety and refuse to let you out of their sight
- behave in a significantly different way than the other children in the family ever have

The most common mental health issue for children is anxiety or anxious behaviour. Sometimes children's issues arise from not having a sense of attachment with their parents or caregivers.

### WHERE CAN YOU GO FOR HELP?



The Ministry for Children and Family Development has Child and Youth Mental Health Teams around the province. They provide services for children from infancy through the age of 18. The team for Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows is located at 22323 119th Avenue in Maple Ridge. They can be reached by calling 604-466-7300. There are two clinicians at the Maple Ridge office who primarily work with the children 6 years and younger. They are part of a multi-disciplinary team that includes clinicians with Masters Degrees in Psychology, a registered psychologist, psychiatric nurses, and a psychiatrist who consults with the team. Child and Youth Mental Health Services provide assessment, treatment, consultation and education.

### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CALL THE CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH TEAM?

When a parent or caregiver phones the Child and Youth Mental Health Team, an intake worker will gather some information from them. This is really a screening process where the clinician is looking for two things:

1. Is there some evidence of mental health symptoms/mental health disorder?
2. Is there significant functional difficulty i.e. is the child having a great deal of difficulty coping?

If both these criteria are present, the child's name will be added to a waiting list and then when the time is available, he or she will be given an appointment to see a clinician. At the appointment, the child will be assessed in order to identify their strengths and their difficulties. The assessment process is sometimes harder to do when children are very young because they may not be very verbal.

If your child is very young, you, as the parent or caregiver will be asked to participate in therapy sessions and help your child practice newly learned skills at home. It's always beneficial to have the parent as part of that process – participating or witnessing so that they can learn and understand the child's needs. Therapy for your child might mean helping them to learn more self-regulation – awareness of feelings, communication strategies and things like that. For the parent it might mean being able to read your child, understand their needs, respond sensitively and appropriately, having some strategies around discipline. Occasionally, a clinician will see a child individually in the play therapy room. Parent consent is important and always needed before a child can receive services.



Clinicians meet with parents as a group, from time to time, to share and discuss information around specific topics. The clinicians also may need to meet with other professionals involved with your child such as preschool or daycare workers, school staff and others. Part of their role is providing case management and helping coordinate services for your child. Sometimes, clinicians may recommend families seek a specialized assessment for Autism, FASD or other complex conditions.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS IF YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR DOESN'T MEET THE CRITERIA?**

During the screening, the clinician may conclude that your child's needs would be better met through other resources and she will suggest some options. These may include community resources such as family education or parent support groups, drop-in groups for parents and children together, public health programs and others. Occasionally, a clinician might suggest that you consult with a paediatrician or your family doctor. Clinicians see about two-thirds of the children and refer the others to more appropriate resources. About 50 to 60 children under the age of 6 are referred by parents and caregivers each year.

#### **HOW LONG IS THE WAITING TIME BEFORE YOUR CHILD WILL BE SEEN?**

It may take a few months before your child is seen by a clinician. There is currently a wait time of about 3 months at the Maple Ridge office. The highest priority is given to children who are experiencing extreme impaired functioning due to mental illness.

#### **THE CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES' PURPOSE IS TO HELP CHILDREN.**

More information:

[http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental\\_health/index.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/index.htm)

<http://www.forcesociety.com/>

<http://heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/community-cymh>

