

Parents are usually the first to recognize that their child has difficulties with emotions or behavior. However, it's not always apparent that professional help is necessary.

If you are worried about your child's emotions or behavior, you can start by first talking to family members, your child's school counselor, or your child's pediatrician about your concerns. If you think your child needs help, you should get as much information as possible about where to find help for your child.

The behavioral health system can sometimes be complicated and difficult for parents to understand. Different communities provide different types of treatment programs and services for children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral difficulties. A complete range of programs and services is called a continuum of care.

The beginning point for parents should be an evaluation by a qualified mental health professional such as a child and adolescent psychiatrist or licensed psychologist. Your child's primary care physician may be able to refer you to a mental health provider. Your child's diagnosis should be made based on professional observation and evaluation, information provided by the family and other experts, behavioral checklists, developmental screenings, and the criteria found in the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM). The evaluation should include a comprehensive look at all aspects of your child's life including in school, with family, with friends, and in the community. At the conclusion of the evaluation, the professional may recommend a certain type of service(s) or treatment from the continuum available locally.

Behavioral health treatment is often paid for by private health insurance. Many health insurance companies cover treatment such as evaluations, outpatient therapy, inpatient hospitalization, partial hospitalization programs, drug and alcohol treatment, and some residential treatment.

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For children with an autism spectrum disorder, the private health insurance may cover additional services as well under a new law “Pennsylvania Autism Insurance Act 62”. For additional information, request Act 62 information using the enclosed resource order form or if you have internet access visit [www.PAAutismInsurance.org](http://www.PAAutismInsurance.org) which has information for families, insurers, and providers.

If your child is not covered by private health insurance, or if your child requires a type of treatment that is not paid for by private health insurance (e.g. Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services, Family Based treatment, Strengths Based treatment, and Multi-Systemic Therapy) the state of Pennsylvania may provide coverage for your child through the medical assistance program. You may be eligible to obtain medical assistance insurance for your child.