

Solutions is a parent newsletter published by ESS during the school year. Each issue highlights an important topic related to children's mental health and provides practical applications for parents in the home environment.

To Medicate, Or Not To Medicate?

Having a child diagnosed with emotional or behavioral problems is difficult for parents, and choosing the best treatment can be daunting. Every parent wants his/her child to be well, but since any treatment (or lack of treatment) has potential side effects, deciding whether or not to use medication may be the biggest challenge of all. The media is flooded with contradictory "expert" opinions on this topic, but there is no substitute for informed parents who are up to speed on the facts, fallacies and ambiguities concerning the use of medication for children.

Effective School Solutions offers you the following guidelines to help you reach the right decision for your child:

1. The first step in this decision making process is to have a qualified professional, preferably a child and adolescent psychiatrist, accurately evaluate, diagnose, treat and monitor your child.
2. At the initial evaluation, share the medical and psychiatric history of your child and family members, your child's current symptoms and stressors (trauma, parental divorce, moves, or deaths), and any other relevant concerns with the doctor.
3. Following the evaluation, if the psychiatrist recommends a trial of medication, don't be afraid to ask questions:
 - What is the name of the drug?
 - What is the cost?
 - Do the benefits of the drug outweigh the risks?
 - Is there scientific evidence that this drug has helped other children with the same condition?
 - How will I know if the medication is working?
 - What are the side effects?
 - Is this drug addictive?
 - Are there laboratory tests needed before and/or during this medication trial?
 - How often will you be checking my child for the effects of the drug?
 - Is there any food, medication, or activity that my child should avoid while taking this drug?
 - How long will the drug take to work?

4. If the doctor, you and your child decide that using a prescribed medication will be beneficial, follow these safety rules:

- Complete all recommended medical tests before and during the drug trial.
- Read the medication label for accuracy of the name, dose and schedule.
- Read the pharmacy insert before giving the medication to your child.
- Store the bottle at proper temperature.
- Lock up the medication.
- Set up a reminder system so there are no missed doses (cell phone alarms are effective).
- Ensure that your child is taking medication as prescribed, by dispensing and monitoring him/her, particularly in the beginning.
- Never abruptly stop a medication without the prescriber's authorization — serious side effects could develop.
- Inform the prescriber if side effects develop such as: thoughts of suicide, a rash, marked sleep or appetite disturbances, severe headaches, tics, changes in blood pressure, rapid mood swings, or for any sign or symptom that is a concern to you or your child.

RESOURCES:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Practice parameter on the use of psychotropic medication in children and adolescents. J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry. 2009;48:961-973.

NYU Child Study Center. Guide to Psychiatric Medications for Children and Adolescents by Glenn S. Hirsch, MD.

WEBSITES:

www.NIMH.nih.gov – National Institutes of Health NIH Publication No. 08-3929.

PARENTS MATTER: Please be an active participant on the in-school support team: you know your child best!

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