

# MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

## GETTING FAMILY MEMBERS ON BOARD WITH TREATMENT

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP  
OCTOBER 2020 MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT

It is not always easy to accept that your child has a mental health issue and then follow through with seeking a diagnosis and treatment. You know your child best. Seeking mental health help for your child is important, and it is not always easy because of stigma. Sometimes family members and friends are not always supportive of mental health treatment. You may feel second-guessed or criticized by those close to you or your child. Here are some strategies to consider when you experience a family member or friend that is not on board with mental health treatment.

- ❖ **Lead with gratitude** – Start by telling the family member how grateful you are for the role they play in your child’s life. You might say, “You mean so much to my child. I know you might not agree with the treatment we have pursued, but we really need you to support what we are doing”. The goal is your child’s success.
- ❖ **Prioritize** – How important is the skeptical person in your life and your child’s life? You may be able to limit interactions if the person does not play an important role. For others, based upon their direct involvement with your family, it may be worth sitting down and having a conversation about the issue.
- ❖ **Practice what you want to say** – Knowing what you want to say and saying it can be two different things, so practice your talking points out loud. This can help you be more confident and comfortable in discussing the diagnosis, medications and treatment, or your plan of action. Talk to people who are supporting your decision.
- ❖ **Explain the diagnosis** – As clearly as possible, explain the diagnosis to the family member or caregiver. Giving some concrete examples of the behaviors you are seeing can help, too. This level of detail may come later as you explore treatment for your child.
- ❖ **Invite questions** – You can say, “I know you care about my child.” or ask, “Do you have any questions?”. By listening, you can get a lot of information about what the person does and does not understand or what their concerns about treatment are. You may be interested in their point of view or concerns.
- ❖ **Be positive** – You are looking to increase a circle of support for the decisions you make to better your child’s success. Family members can support you and your child by praising and reinforcing the behaviors your child is working on instead of responding to their negative behavior.
- ❖ **Share the tools you have learned and the goals you are working on** – Share the specifics of what you have learned from your child’s clinician and the skills you have been practicing with your child. Model the ways to interact with your child to get positive results.
- ❖ **When in doubt, blame the therapist** – It can be okay to put the blame on the therapist. You can say, “The psychologist said you need to stop talking like that because it is not helpful.” Many therapists are also willing to communicate directly with extended family or caregivers with your permission.
- ❖ **Offer resources** – You can also point your family or caregiver toward some reliable resources online including organizations that specifically address your child’s diagnosis. Check out the website for the Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health at <https://www.ffcmh.org/>.
- ❖ **Protect your child and look for positive support** – Sometimes, it remains impossible to change a person’s beliefs about mental health treatment. Always monitor your child’s interactions with others so they are not subject to bullying or negative comments about their behavior. Hope that everyone wants what is best for your child and that can serve as motivation to be positive, confident and have a circle of support for you and your child.

Excerpted from: <https://childming.org/article/getting-family-members-on-board-with-treatment>