

# MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

## IMPROVING TREATMENT ENGAGEMENT IN CHILDREN

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP  
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One of the most common concerns mental health professionals hear from parents is that their child does not want to participate in treatment. Whether they decline to attend their appointments, or go and do not participate in their session, their mental health is not improving due to that lack of engagement. Treatment is not effective unless there is participation and following the clinician recommendations and treatment plan. This is a problem many parents face. In this month's edition of Mental Health TidBIT, we discuss how to increase your child's engagement in treatment. The information provided discusses how families can improve treatment outcomes by understanding how to work with their child and child's clinician to encourage engagement in treatment.

**Helping Relationship-** This refers to relationship between the therapist and person/family referred for services. In the case of a child, this refers to the therapist's relationship with both the child and the child's family or guardian. It is important that both the child and family develop a trusting relationship with the therapist. Not every clinician you encounter the first time is going to be the best fit for your child. Developing a trusting relationship can make counseling much more meaningful for your family. It is acceptable and not uncommon to switch therapists if you or your child are not able to bond with your current provider. If you or your child do not feel comfortable talking to you doctor or therapist, treatment will not be able to progress, and therefore, be ineffective. This decision should be weighed against your child/family needs and factors like waiting for services.

**Treatment Expectations-**Treatment expectations are what the consumer expects from treatment and what they expect their role in treatment to be. Goals and tasks should be clearly defined for the clinician, child, and family. A child may feel they will be cured after one session, and this typically is not feasible. Allowing unrealistic expectations to develop in your child will lead to frustration and unsuccessful treatment. Outlining positive but realistic expectations will lead to better results. Children do need to know that they should expect improvement in their symptoms with treatment. Studies have shown that having this expectation does impact actual symptom improvement.

**Motivation for Behavior Change-**When dealing with an illness such as depression, it can often be hard for a child to identify this as symptoms of an illness causing distress and not an actual part of their identity. This can lead to lack of motivation to change. You may have a child who reluctantly goes to therapy each week but does not participate because they do not feel they need to be there. Children often lack the confidence to know they can get better, and that treatment can work. An approach that is often helpful for children is motivational interviewing. This is an evidence-based therapy technique which helps an individual find motivation to change their behavior. It allows the consumer to be an active part in shaping their treatment and acknowledges that each individual may be at a different stage in their recovery. It may be helpful for you to ask your child's prospective or current clinician if they are familiar with or practice this type of intervention.

If your child continues to resist treatment, have a conversation with them. Your child may feel that nothing is going to help them or that treatment will not work. The answer may be as simple as changing the way you frame treatment. If your child is an athlete, they may understand that they need a coach to help them with their soccer skills. Explain that just like a soccer coach, they may need a "coach" to teach them new strategies or skills to deal with their mental health. Additionally, be sure that you are validating your child's concerns about treatment and letting them know that you will support them through the process.

Excerpted from: <https://childmind.org/article/improving-treatment-adherence-teens/>

Excerpted from: <https://childmind.org/article/helping-resistant-teens-into-treatment/>