

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A DIAGNOSIS?

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/ID PROGRAM
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When a child is experiencing emotional or behavioral problems, there are no blood tests or scans that will tell you what's wrong. The key to getting good help is getting a good picture of what's happening.

Below are some areas to consider when your child is being evaluated:

A broad evaluation A clinician needs to gather information on all aspects of your child's emotional and behavioral functioning—not just the short list of things you find problematic. Often the presenting symptoms can have many different causes.

A complete history Your clinician should ask questions not only about your child's current mood and functioning, but about your child's history, too. Knowing how your child's behaviors have evolved and changed as he developed can make a big difference in understanding what's bothering him now, and how to treat it. The clinician should also ask about your child's strengths, including what your child enjoys doing and activities where he does well.

Consider more than one problem Another goal of detailed interviewing is to avoid the mistake of assuming that all of your child's behaviors have a single source. It's very common for children to have a number of overlapping challenges.

Multiple Sources A clinician should also not depend solely on parents for information on a child's functioning. Some children behave very differently in different settings, such as at home and at school. That's why it's important for a clinician to gather information from the child himself, parents, teachers and other adults who have knowledge of him. Screening tools, in the form of questionnaires and rating scales, are often used to collect information from other sources.

Diagnostic tools There are many specialized diagnostic tools clinicians use to help get an objective take on a child's behaviors and symptoms. Some of these tools take the form of **structured interviews**, in which a clinician asks a set of specific questions about a child's behavior. The questions/answers help guide the clinician's thinking in making a diagnosis. Some of the tools used to aid in collecting information are **rating scales**, in which the child is rated numerically on a list of symptoms.

Finding a qualified professional Here are some questions to ask to help you decide if a particular clinician is a good match for your needs: 1) What kind of training do you have? 2) Are you board certified and/or licensed? 3) How much experience do you have diagnosing children whose behaviors are similar to my child's? 4) How do you arrive at a diagnosis? 5) Will you recommend treatment options and make referrals to other professionals if needed?

Finally, it is important to ask the clinician how they arrived at the diagnosis and how medication prescribed fits with this diagnosis and can help.

<https://childmind.org/article/what-should-you-look-for-in-a-diagnosis/>