

# Caregiver's Guide to **PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATIONS**

## **Foster Care Youth & Psychotropics**

Many youth in foster care experience mental health struggles and need further evaluation. A careful evaluation should include an interview with the child and others involved in that child's life. A child's history of abuse, neglect, or trauma is one important piece of the puzzle for doctors to understand when deciding a treatment plan. Psychotropic medication can be an effective part of a treatment plan that may also include medical follow up and therapy or counseling.

1 in 4 foster youth between ages 6 and 17 are given psychotropics for mental health struggles. Whether starting, continuing, or ending psychotropic use, always check with your doctor.

## **What's a Psychotropic?**

Psychotropic medicines are those used to treat mental health conditions such as ADHD, depression, anxiety, and more.

Symptoms of these conditions that may benefit from psychotropic medicines can include, but are not limited to, angry outbursts, or difficulty focusing in school.

## **What Treatment Options are Available for Mental Health Problems?**

### Therapy

Working with a professional to develop skills to help with symptoms.

### Psychotropics

Taking medications to help with symptoms.

**BOTH**  
By far the most common option.

## What's My Role?

- Work with the child to understand their story.
- Schedule and attend medical, psychiatric and therapy appointments.
- Ask the doctor about the best treatment plan.
- Learn how to give medication. Only you, the caregiver, can give the child medication. If the child is mature enough, they can take their medication under your direct supervision.
- Ensure the medication has the child's name and lists the drug name and directions as described by



the doctor.

- Talk to the child regularly to see how they feel on the treatment plan.
- Record any of the child's mood or behavioral changes with dates and details.
- Schedule follow-up appointments to discuss any changes in the child's physical or mental health.
- Consider locking up medications to ensure they are kept in a safe place.

## What Questions Should I Ask the Doctor?

- Why does the doctor suggest starting, stopping, or continuing this treatment?
- When will this treatment start to work?
- What are this treatment's expectations?
- How and when does the child take this treatment?
- How do the psychotropic medication options work with the therapy options? If psychotropic medication is recommended, which one?
- What's the plan if the child's symptoms get worse or don't improve?
- What are the risks and benefits of this psychotropic medication?
- How often should we revisit the doctor?
- What do we do if a side effect appears?
- What changes in the child should we watch for?
- How else can I help the child?

## What Should I Prepare for the Doctor's Visit?

- The child's complete health history, both physical and mental, if you have this information.
- Anything you know about the child's family health history, both physical and mental.
- The child's history of trauma (physical and emotional).
- The child's symptoms. If you can, write down and track:
  - » Symptoms
  - » When symptoms started
  - » If symptoms changed
  - » Any events that happened before symptoms started or worsened
- The child's skills and qualities that help them cope, grow, and heal.

## LEARN MORE

### Foster Children, Trauma, and Psychotropics:

[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/mhc\\_caregivers.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/mhc_caregivers.pdf)

### When to Seek Help:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/children-and-mental-health/index.shtml>

### Doctor's Visits:

<https://www.ahrq.gov/chain/patient-tools/medicine-safety/mental-health-problems-foster-children.html>

### Family Resources from the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry:

[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Family\\_Resources/Home.aspx?hkey=5bd95eb8-aabb-4110-b706-90216cbe33df](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Family_Resources/Home.aspx?hkey=5bd95eb8-aabb-4110-b706-90216cbe33df)

### Parents Med Guide, helping parents help their kids:

[ParentsMedGuide.org](https://www.ParentsMedGuide.org)