

Psychotropic Medication and Medication Management – 1 hour

What are psychotropic medications?

Psychotropic medications are used to treat emotional and behavioral health symptoms and disorders. They act on the central nervous system and affect mood, thoughts, behaviors, effecting how a person processes information and perceives his or her surroundings.

Children who are traumatized by abuse or neglect may show negative behaviors or signs of emotional stress that are a normal reaction to what they have been through. Also, all children act out at different stages of their lives. For example, two-year olds commonly have temper tantrums and teenagers often rebel.

Most children will gradually heal in an appropriate environment and with consistent interventions. But some children need medication to cope with the trauma of abuse or neglect. Other children need medication to treat behavioral health disorders that they inherited or developed, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), severe depression, or psychosis.

Psychotropic medications help children feel better and control their symptoms so they can function at home, in school, and in their daily lives. They may need these medications temporarily to treat emotional stress or long-term to treat life-long behavioral health disorders.

In general, psychotropic medications must be taken for a few weeks before any changes are seen.

Content taken from http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Psychotropic_Medication/page07.asp.

What about Benefits and Side Effects?

Medications make life easier for many children and adults every day. Medications save lives, relieve pain, manage troublesome symptoms, and help people improve their ability to function in the world. These medications specifically target symptoms and issues associated with mental illness and mental health.

- Thought disorders, such as schizophrenia, can often be helped by medications such as risperidone (Risperdal), which promotes the ability to think more clearly and function at a higher level.
- Mood disorders, such as depression, can be helped with medications such as sertraline (Zoloft), which help regulate emotions and address basic issues like sleep and concentration.
- Behavior disorders, such as conduct disorder, can often be helped with anti-anxiety medications such as atenolol (Tenormin), to help manage aggressive outbursts.
- Attention disorders, such as attention deficit disorder, can be managed with medications such as amphetamines (Adderal) to improve focus, increase concentration ability, and decrease vulnerability to distraction.

While psychotropic medications can have many benefits, they also may have side effects. Side effects are unwanted changes that occur in addition to the intended positive effects. Side effects vary from

medication to medication and person to person. Some possible side effects of psychotropic medications include sleepiness, stomach upset, headaches, nervousness, irritability, and weight gain. Often, side effects will go away within a few weeks. You may decide that it's worth putting up with side effects, if the benefits outweigh them.

Content taken from http://www.americanbar.org/publications/child_law_practice/vol_31/sample_issue/psychotropic_medicationandchildreninfostercaretipsforadvocatesan.html and <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/psychmedyouthguide.pdf>.

Treatment Options

Medications should never be the sole mode of treatment for mental health disorders. Counseling should be provided to help children learn to manage or minimize their symptoms. Children often need to learn new skills, such as anger management or problem solving, to help them interact with others more successfully. Some children need to talk about their trauma or their grief to make sense of and resolve it; medication will not do this for them. Additional types of treatment may include Play Therapy, Social Skills Group, Parent-Child Interactive Therapy (PCIT), Dialectic Behavioral Therapy (DBT), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Child-Parent Psychotherapy, Parent Coaching, and Anger Management Groups.

Managing mental health issues and the symptoms experienced by children and adolescents involves many modalities:

- Medication treatment can alleviate or lessen the symptoms that accompany many mental health disorders. For example, medication may decrease the impulse to tantrum, help a child regulate emotions, or eliminate hallucinations. In addition, proper medication support can provide behavioral stability and support with emotional regulation that a child or teen may need to readily engage in other forms of therapy. For example, a very depressed teen who cannot control her crying when she needs to be able to talk about her abuse and history can feel more in control emotionally with the right medication, allowing her to discuss the important issues and aid in her healing.
- Behavioral therapy, for example using reward charts, can help increase positive behaviors and decrease negative acting out.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy can help correct a pattern of negative thoughts that interfere with the ability to relate to others.
- Play therapy can help heal past trauma and facilitate a child's return to normal functioning.
- Child-parent therapy involves working directly with the parent and child to address issues within their relationship and help the child increase healthy ways of interacting and functioning. Parents are helped to become more reflective, develop a deeper understanding of their child and their role in their child's life. They also learn how to interact with their child in ways that promote a healthy and secure attachment and to support a healthy growth and development trajectory. Parent coaching can also be an element of this modality.
- Dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) can provide important skills, such as distress tolerance and emotional regulation, in struggling adolescents and help them integrate them into their daily interactions.

Content taken from http://www.americanbar.org/publications/child_law_practice/vol_31/sample_issue/psychotropic_medicationandchildreninfostercaretipsforadvocatesan.html.

Medication Management

- Give the medication exactly as prescribed and never more or less unless directed by the doctor.
- Never quit giving the medication to the child unless the doctor tells you to quit.
- Follow the doctor's direction for giving the medication. For example, the doctor may tell you to give the medication at a certain time of day or to make sure the child does not eat certain foods.
- Give the medication to the child and watch to make sure the child takes the medication.
- Never give a child a medication that is prescribed for someone else.
- Keep a medication log for each child. Write down the date, time, and who gave the medication to the child.
- Coordinate with the doctor to make sure you get refills on time.
- Some psychotropic medications require weaning off gradually. Always follow the doctor's instructions when stopping medications.
- Keep medications in a locked box.

Content taken from http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Psychotropic_Medication/page23.asp.

Psychotropic Medications

Review the medications, uses, and side effects here, and be sure to advance through the slides to the end of the section: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Psychotropic_Medication/page35.asp

Answer these below questions and email them to ecollins@nvfs.org to receive credit for this training.

1. All children in foster care need psychotropic medications to help relieve emotional stress caused from the trauma of abuse and neglect.
A - True
B - False
2. Medication is the only treatment option for ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), depression, or anxiety.
A - True
B - False
3. Stimulants are commonly used to treat which behavioral health condition:
A - Depression
B - ADHD
C - Anxiety
D - Psychosis
4. Which of the following classes of medications should not be stopped suddenly and require gradual weaning by the doctor:
A - Antipsychotics and antidepressants
B - Stimulants and antidepressants
C - Mood stabilizers and stimulants
D - All psychotropic medications can be stopped suddenly