

Knowing when to get help

Parents and carers are usually the first to recognise when their child has difficulties with their emotions, thinking or behaviour. Sometimes, these difficulties may be more obvious at school where teaching staff have the opportunity to observe a range of children and their behaviour. Early signs of difficulty include having trouble managing emotions (anger and/or anxiety), or coping with change, thinking negatively about themselves (eg often saying, "I'm no good"), working cooperatively and/or making and keeping friends.

Look for B-E-T-L-S

The key things to observe when you are concerned that children may have mental health difficulties are:



Behaviour



Emotions



Thoughts



Learning



Social relationships

How to gather good observations

- Focus on specific things that happen (what you actually see and hear rather than what you think about it).
- Take note of when a particular behaviour happens, where it happens and how often it happens.
- Notice what things trigger children's difficulties and what things make them better.

Gathering good observations of particular behaviours is often a first step towards helping children. Looking for all the 'B-E-T-L-S' allows you to get a clearer understanding of a child's difficulties. This means better decisions can be made about when children need help and how to help. Finding out how your child responds in different settings allows you to get a more complete picture about your child.



Observation clues

What to consider

What are the specific things your child does that concern you?
Consider your child's behaviour, emotions, thinking, learning and social relationships.

When and where do they occur?

Are there any specific triggers?

How often do these things occur?

What makes them better or worse?

How long has your child had this difficulty?

Additional factors to take into account

How well the child manages feelings.

How learning is affected.

How well the child relates to peers and others.

Any comments the child makes about him or herself or the situation.

Behaviours that parents and carers might notice

My daughter seems to worry a lot. It stops her from having fun. She gets worried about things at school. She worries that her homework will not be good enough. She worries that the other children won't play with her.

Getting ready for school in the morning is the worst time, especially Monday morning.

At least once or twice a week. She seemed to get worse when one of her friends was moved to a different class.

She feels better when her friends phone her at home. She seems to feel included then.

Since the start of the year. Some children were teasing her because she wears glasses. They stopped it but she stayed anxious.

Usually bottles things up, but then cries over something small. Once upset she can be hard to soothe.

She does well in class because she puts in a lot of effort. But if she has to do a talk or present her work she gets panicky.

Seems okay with her close friends. But she is very shy with new people.

She says things like, "I'm dumb," and, "Nobody likes me."
She seems to put herself down a lot.

Getting help for your child

If you are concerned that your child has excessive worries, fears or feels 'bad' about her or himself and you are not sure how to go about getting help, try the following steps:

Find out more

Talk to school staff or others who have regular contact with your child and find out if they have concerns about your child.

Talk to your child's school about seeing the school psychologist or counsellor

The psychologist or counsellor at your child's school can listen to your concerns and discuss options for helping your child at home and at school.

See your general practitioner

Your doctor can explore any physical health concerns and help you decide about the need for further mental health assessment and professional support by referring you to a children's mental health specialist if required.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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