



Child & Adolescent | *Tip sheet*

# *Psychiatric Medication* Use in Children and Teens

Psychiatric medications can help children manage emotional or behavior problems. These medicines can ease symptoms and help children do better at home, in school, and in daily life.

## **Common Reasons Children Take Medication**

**ADHD:** Trouble paying attention, sitting still, or stopping impulsive actions.

**Depression:** Ongoing sadness, low energy, or changes in sleep or appetite. Some children may also have thoughts of death or suicide.

**Anxiety:** Excess worry, strong fears, panic attacks, or repeated thoughts or actions they cannot stop.

**Severe aggression:** Behaviors like hurting others, breaking things, or harming themselves.

## **General Principles**

Before giving medicine, the doctor should do a full check-up. This may include a physical exam or blood tests.

Medication should be only one part of care. Other support may include therapy, family guidance, and clear routines at home.

Parents or legal guardians must give consent. Children and teens should also agree when they can.

Talk with your child about the medication. Explain why it is needed, how it helps, what side effects to watch for, and what other options are available.

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## Questions to Ask the Prescriber

- What dose does my child need, and how often?
- Will my child need blood tests or other tests?
- How will we know the medicine is working, and when will we see change?
- What side effects should we look for, and what do we do if they appear?
- How long will my child need this medicine? How will we know when to stop?
- Will this medicine interact with any foods, other medications, or supplements?

## Important Terms

### Off-Label Use

Some psychiatric medicines are not FDA-approved for use in children. Doctors may still prescribe them based on research and clinical experience. This is called off-label use.

### Black Box Warnings

A black box warning is the FDA's strongest safety alert. It warns about serious or life-threatening risks. Most antidepressants have a black box warning about increased suicidal thoughts or behavior in people under age 25. Doctors should explain these risks and watch for any new or worsening symptoms, especially when starting or changing a dose.

*Reviewed by Care Manager, Clinical Operations, LCSW*

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