



Working with CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services)



'At first I wasn't sure what to think of my therapist at CAMHS. It was really scary meeting someone new and telling them all about how I was feeling. **But once I got to know her I realised she was dead nice, and just wanted to help me.'**

Help for children and young people

Mental health problems don't only affect adults: children and young people can suffer too. Developmental conditions like ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) are typically diagnosed in childhood, and some adult or lifelong conditions such as schizophrenia commonly begin in adolescence. Other conditions – often responses to stress, such as behavioural problems, self-harm or eating disorders – frequently develop during the teenage years. As with adult illness, there's always a range of causes, including genetics, early experiences, family environment and recent life events.

CAMHS teams offer specialist support for young people up to the age of 18 who need more help than can be provided by their GP or school nurse. CAMHS is made up of a team of professionals with different skills and backgrounds who work together to support the children and young people referred to them. You can find out more about the different professionals involved in a mental health team on our accessing help page -

www.mentalhealthaccesspack.org/practical-tips/accessing-help

How does someone get referred to CAMHS?

The most common route is through a GP. However, other professionals can refer to CAMHS, including school nurses, teachers and social workers.

What to expect

The first stage after someone is referred is all about getting to know them, their situation and the things they are experiencing. This is known as assessment and can continue for several appointments. After this, a decision will be made about what kind of support is required, and how and where this is best given. The exact treatment, and who provides it, will always depend upon the individual and their needs.

Who should go?

CAMHS will usually ask the child/young person who they would like with them at their appointments, or whether they would prefer to be on their own. There may also be times when they ask to see particular people, usually members of the family. Older teenagers have a right to confidentiality



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and to decide who is included in their treatment and decisions about it. Although CAMHS will encourage them to talk to their family, they will respect any right to confidentiality unless there are serious concerns for the young person's safety.

Will there be a long wait for help?

CAMHS is an extremely busy service, and the challenges facing them have been well-documented in the press. However, children/young people who are in urgent need should still be seen, and teams will do their best to respond quickly. If you are concerned about a delay – for example if the child/young person is very distressed, or getting worse and has heard nothing – don't be afraid to return to the GP, or whoever made the initial referral.

How can I support someone who has been referred to CAMHS?

Being referred to CAMHS is a difficult step for a lot of people, and good support from those around them can make a huge difference. You can help by preparing them for what to expect, helping them get ready for appointments (for example, thinking about what they might want to say), dealing with tricky times, such as during the wait for an appointment, and also giving them good opportunities to talk about how they feel after appointments.

Support like this is crucial, particularly in the early stages. Often a referral comes at a time of real crisis, when people are experiencing powerful emotions. Developing trust for a new person who is offering help is not easy, and it isn't uncommon at first for people to feel that they don't really like the person they're seeing, or afraid that they won't be able to help. These feelings are normal and usually resolve as the child/young person gets more used to this new situation. Encourage them to give it time, and to avoid making snap decisions about people they meet, or the treatment offered. Having time and space to discuss what they are feeling and to be honest about worries and concerns will ultimately help them develop that trust and engage with the people who can help them feel better.



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What if they don't want to go?

It's very common for children and young people to feel apprehensive about their first appointments at CAMHS. Going to meet someone they don't know, to talk about things they are struggling with, is extremely daunting. Also, many CAMHS services are in buildings that can be quite intimidating. Talking about these feelings can make all the difference, especially if you can either reassure them about anything specific they're worried about, or help them find answers to their concerns.

What is most important is that they don't just miss appointments or make excuses for why they didn't attend. If they refuse to go, make sure you discuss this with someone at CAMHS. If the young person is particularly anxious, it may be possible for them to have a visit at home instead.

Offering support alongside CAMHS

Churches can have a role here, too. As well as general support, there may be someone who can meet regularly with the family or the child/young person. This could be as part of pastoral care, youth work or a more formal mentoring relationship. Support like this can be very valuable, offering additional time and space for them to process their thoughts and feelings, and work on things that have come up in their time with CAMHS professionals.

However, there may be times when it's better not to discuss sessions or treatment. Instead, it's equally important the child/young person is given support to do normal things like play, go to the park or cinema, or have some 'down time'.

⇒ Helpful links:

Young Minds has a detailed website with lots of support about CAMHS for both children/young people and parents, and a helpline for parents:

➔ www.youngminds.org.uk

For very helpful advice on what to do if something goes wrong with CAMHS treatment, or if you have a complaint:

➔ www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/your-guide-to-support



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A great website designed for people referred to CAMHS, answering common questions, with videos of people who have experienced CAMHS care, and real professionals working in CAMHS:

➔ www.mycamhschoices.org

Read about how one local church got involved in helping struggling children and young people:

➔ <https://tinyurl.com/supporting-local-schools>

Some videos and resources by Young Minds which explore the emotions teenagers feel:

➔ <https://tinyurl.com/public-mind-videos>