


YOUNG MINDS

The voice for young people's mental health and wellbeing

**WHAT IS
CAMHS?**



This leaflet is for parents or carers whose child has been referred to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). It is also for parents or carers who want to know how to get support from CAMHS.

This leaflet covers:

- **What is CAMHS?**
- **Why do children, young people and families get referred to CAMHS?**
- **How can we get a CAMHS referral?**
- **Who works in CAMHS?**
- **What will happen when we go to CAMHS?**
- **How can we make the most of the first appointment at CAMHS?**
- **What should I do if my child is on the waiting list for CAMHS?**
- **What rights do my child and I have if we are being supported by CAMHS?**
- **Useful organisations**

Why do children & young people get referred to CAMHS?

Children, young people and their families can be offered support by CAMHS if they are experiencing difficulties with their behaviour or emotions, or are finding it hard to cope with life in the family, at school or in the wider world.

The types of problems CAMHS can help with include:

- **Violent or angry behaviour**
- **Depression**
- **Eating difficulties**
- **Low self esteem**
- **Relationship problems**
- **Anxiety and phobias**
- **Obsessions and compulsions**
- **Sleep difficulties**
- **Self-harming**
- **The effects of abuse or traumatic events**

CAMHS can also diagnose and treat serious mental health problems such as:

- **Psychosis**
- **Bipolar disorder**
- **Schizophrenia**
- **Anorexia nervosa**

CAMHS may also diagnose and offer support with developmental disorders such as Autism and ADHD but this differs from area to area so ask your GP for advice about this.

“ CAMHS offer assessment & treatment for families where children & young people have emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties ”

How can we get a referral to CAMHS?

There are different ways to get a referral to CAMHS, but the most common way is via your child's GP. You can discuss your worries about your child and if the child is old enough and feels able to do so, they can see the GP themselves. The GP may be able to offer advice or if they think specialist help is needed, they will write a letter to CAMHS asking them to make an appointment for your child.

Other professionals who may be able to make a referral to CAMHS include:

- **Teachers or other school staff**
- **Health visitors**
- **School nurses**
- **Social workers**
- **Youth counselling services**

CAMHS are expected to work with children and young people **up to the age of 18**. However some services stop working with young people at age 16, or will only work with a person aged 16-18 if they are in full time education. If your child is over the age at which their local CAMHS stops seeing young people, they may need to be referred to the adult mental health team, or to other support services for older young people. Different areas have different ways of organising their services so it is best to ask your GP about this.

What is CAMHS?

CAMHS stands for **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**.

CAMHS offer **assessment and treatment for families where children and young people have emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties**.

CAMHS are usually **NHS services**. They are sometimes called 'Specialist CAMHS', because there are also other services which can help children and young people with their mental health, such as youth counselling and school counselling. This leaflet is **not** about those other services and in this leaflet we will just say CAMHS.

Who works in CAMHS?

Many different types of mental health professionals work together in CAMHS, and much of what they do is quite similar.

Their aim is to work together with children, young people and families:

- **To try and understand your child's experiences and feelings, and assess what might be causing the difficulties**
- **To help you and your child understand what are the things you and they want to change, and what your goals are for the future**
- **To offer support, treatment and ideas about how to make things better**

Every CAMHS team will be slightly different, but you may meet some of the following:



Clinical Psychologists

Clinical Psychologists are trained to understand thinking, behaviour and emotions. They use their training to work with people to get a really good understanding of a person's life to understand why a problem might be there. Clinical Psychologists can offer therapeutic help with issues like phobias, anxiety, depression, and relationship difficulties. They can offer parenting advice and strategies for managing behavioural problems. They can also complete assessments and tests which look at memory, concentration, attention and other thinking skills.

Family (Systemic) Therapists

Family Therapists are trained to help family members find constructive ways to help each other overcome difficulties. Family therapy sessions aim to provide a safe place for families to talk about difficult things, and understand each other's experiences, needs and views. This can help them to build on family strengths, make useful changes in their relationships and explore possible ways forward.

Nurses

Nurses working in CAMHS are senior nurses who have specialised in working with children and young people with mental health problems. They are trained to form therapeutic relationships with children and families and to care for and support young people. Some nurses can prescribe and administer some medication.

Child & Adolescent Psychotherapists

Child and Adolescent Psychotherapists are trained to understand how children and young people develop emotionally, and the impact that early experiences can have on later relationships and behaviour. They use this understanding in therapy, to build a relationship with the child or young person. Through this relationship, using talk, play and sometimes drawing, they help the child or young person work through emotional difficulties and make sense of what might be causing them so they can move forward.

Child & Adolescent Psychiatrists

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists are medically qualified doctors. They have specialist training in working with children and adolescents with mental health problems. They are able to diagnose specific disorders and to prescribe medication. They work with families to identify what might be causing difficulties, and suggest ways of resolving the problems.

Clinical Social Workers

Clinical Social Workers are Social Workers with extra training and experience to work with in CAMHS to help and support families who are having difficulties or are struggling. Clinical Social Workers do therapeutic and supportive work with families. They work with all sorts of families but may focus on children and young people who are under the care of social services.

You may meet other professionals too, and if you are offered an appointment with anyone at CAMHS and don't know what their job is, or how they work, it is ok to ask them to explain.

“ Different types of mental health professionals work together in CAMHS... their aim is to work together with children, young people and families ”

What will happen when we go to CAMHS?

The assessment process

CAMHS will send a letter offering one or more appointments with professionals from the CAMHS team. This meeting might be for you and your child or they might invite other family members to attend too. This initial meeting or series of meetings is known as an **assessment**.

The meeting will enable you and your child to talk to the CAMHS team about what has caused the referral to be made, and about what has happened up to now. Your child should have the chance to put their point of view too, and they might have a different idea to you as to whether there is a problem and what sort of help they want. Your child may be given some psychological tests or games to play, so that their thinking and behaviour can be observed.

Following the assessment, the CAMHS staff will meet together and think about what might be causing the issues that your child is experiencing. They may identify a few different factors which might be affecting your child's behaviour or emotions. If appropriate the CAMHS team may make a **diagnosis** of a particular mental health condition, such as depression, or a developmental disorder such as autism.

They may tell you what they think by sending a written **report**, or talk it through with you in a meeting. If there is anything that is said that you don't understand, it is very important to ask for it to be explained. Your child may or may not attend the meeting based on their age or understanding.

Treatment & support

CAMHS should then tell you if they can offer support to your family. If they are not able to help they should be able to let you know about a more appropriate service, either within the NHS or elsewhere. Your child may be able to access youth counselling services, which are separate from CAMHS – see details for Youth Access at the end of this leaflet.

If your child is offered support at CAMHS, it may be individual sessions, or sessions with one parent or the whole family. Which type of professional offers the help and how often the sessions are will depend on your child's needs and the way the service is organised.

Your child should have a treatment plan which sets out what is expected from the work and how long it might go on for. Support may be offered for a limited number of sessions, or for a longer period of time.

Reviews

There are usually reviews after a certain number of sessions, where the therapist feeds back how they feel your child is progressing.

Ending treatment

The CAMHS team may tell you when they think your child's treatment should end, but they should take into account the feelings and opinions of your child and also those of parents and carers. Ending treatment should happen over an agreed timescale so everyone is prepared.

If your child reaches the upper age limit of the CAMHS service they are involved with, but still needs support, the CAMHS team must ensure they are referred to an appropriate service for adults or older young people. This is called **Transition** – see separate YoungMinds guides for parents, carers, professionals and young people.

How can we make the most of the first appointment at CAMHS?

It can be really helpful to talk to your child before the appointment so they know a bit about CAMHS and are prepared for the meeting.

You can think with your child and from your own perspective, about the following things, and make notes if you think it will help you to remember:

- **When did the problems or worries start?**
- **Is there a pattern to the behaviour? (A diary or log book will help you do this)**
- **Have there been any important events within the family such as divorce or bereavement?**
- **How does your child get on with siblings and other family members?**
- **How is your child getting on at school?**
- **How are your child's friendships going?**
- **Are there any general health problems, either now or in the child's early years?**
- **Have your family had help from other professionals?**

“ Talk to your child before the appointment so they know a bit about CAMHS and are prepared for the meeting ”



You can also write out a list of questions that you or your child might want to ask the CAMHS staff, for example:

- **What are the problems/worries caused by?**
- **Is there a diagnosis?**
- **What kind of help is available?**
- **Is a particular treatment recommended for this type of problem?**
- **How does the suggested treatment work?**
- **What can we do to help?**

If your child doesn't want to go to their CAMHS appointment, you can ask the service to send or email some information to them, explaining what will happen there – many CAMHS services have websites with information for children and young people. You can attend the appointment yourself and explain that your child does not want to come. In some cases it may be possible for someone to visit your child and talk to them at home.

What should I do if my child is on the waiting list for CAMHS?

Waiting lists for CAMHS vary and it is worth asking your GP what the waiting time is like in your area, or contacting the CAMHS administrator directly.

In the meantime it can help to talk to your child and their teachers, GP or other people who support them, about how to help them while waiting for the CAMHS process to start.

You can also contact **YoungMinds Parents' Helpline**, which has a team of qualified child and adolescent mental health specialists, who can give you advice about **managing your child's difficulties while you are waiting for services**. The service also has booklets and leaflets for young people and parents which can help.

If you feel the waiting time is particularly long, you should consider contacting your NHS Trusts' Patients Advisory Liaison Service (PALS). You can find details in the phone book or through a Citizens Advice Bureau. You can make a formal complaint if you feel you are not being offered help within a reasonable time, and can also try contacting your local MP.



What rights do my child and I have if we are being supported by CAMHS?



Complaints

All CAMHS services have complaints procedures and these should be explained to you. If you or your child are unhappy with anything about the support offered, you have the right to talk to the CAMHS staff about it and ask them what can be done to improve things.

Access to records

Your child has the right to see their case records in most cases, they can ask their CAMHS worker informally or might have to ask officially using formal procedures CAMHS will explain.

Support for particular needs

If you or your child need particular support, for example an interpreter or for someone to come with you to meetings, you should make this clear to the CAMHS staff so they can help with this.

Consent

The CAMHS staff must make sure both your child and you agree to accept the support they are offering, and explain what other options there are if you do not agree with their suggestions.

Confidentiality

The CAMHS staff must explain to you how and with whom they might share any information given by you or your child. Your child has the right to mention things in their sessions which are confidential from you, and equally you have the right to say things which are kept confidential from your child. However if anyone at CAMHS is given information that someone is being harmed or is at risk of harm, they have a duty to break confidentiality.

Useful organisations:

**IF YOU FEEL THERE IS
ANYTHING YOU
OR YOUR CHILD
DOESN'T UNDERSTAND
OR YOU NEED EXTRA
HELP
EVEN IF YOU THINK IT IS
SILLY OR EMBARRASSING,
ASK THE CAMHS
WORKERS
TO EXPLAIN**

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YoungMinds

The YoungMinds Parents' Helpline offers free confidential online and telephone support, including information and advice, to any adult worried about the emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a child or young person up to the age of 25.

T: 0808 802 5544 Monday to Friday 9.30am-4pm

E: parents@youngminds.org.uk

W: www.youngminds.org.uk has information on mental health for parents, children and young people and professionals

Association of Child Psychotherapists

Information on how Child Psychotherapists work, NHS services and how to find a private therapist

T: 020 8458 1609

W: www.childpsychotherapy.org.uk

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Membership organisation for psychiatrists, mental and treatment health information.

T: 020 7235 2351

W: www.rcpsych.ac.uk

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Largest professional body of counsellors and psychotherapists. Information on finding the right therapist, including NHS and private.

T: 01455 883300

W: www.bacp.co.uk

UK Council for Psychotherapy

Holds the national register of psychotherapists and can give details of local counsellors and psychotherapists.

T: 020 7014 9955

W: www.psychotherapy.org.uk

British Psychological Society

Representative body for psychologists in the UK. Information on how psychologists can help with mental health problems, and how to find a psychologist.

T: 0116 254 9568

W: www.bps.org.uk

Youth Access

Searchable list of young people's counselling and advice services in the UK.

T: 0208 772 9900

W: www.youthaccess.org.uk

