

# Psychiatric Medications Used in Children and Teenagers



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**Treating emotional and behavioral problems in children and teenagers often includes a combination of approaches.** There are many research-based, effective treatments for children and teenagers with different mental health problems. Both talk therapy (psychotherapy) and medications have scientific evidence for improving mental health problems.

## **Talk to your child's doctor if you have concerns about:**

- **Physical aggression or threats of self-harm:** You are afraid that your child's behavior could present a danger to self or others. **(Call 911, go to the nearest emergency room, or call your local mental health crisis line for any safety concerns or emergencies.)**
- **Severe tantrums or other problem behaviors:** Your child's verbal outbursts frequently escalate to uncontrollable screaming and/or physical aggression.
- **Severe worry or anxiety:** In children, worries often appear as physical symptoms (stomachaches or headaches) or behaviors (reluctance to go to school or take part in normal activities, trouble eating and sleeping, irritability, etc.).
- **Mood problems:** These can include irritability, sadness, elation, or severe mood swings.
- **Academic difficulty:** This can include falling grades or trouble keeping up at school.
- **Attention and/or hyperactivity issues:** Your child has fidgeting or trouble paying attention beyond what is normal for their age, and this is interfering with functioning.
- **Sleeping or eating difficulty:** You are concerned because your child gets too little, too much, or disrupted sleep; has nightmares; or has had a significant increase or decrease in appetite or weight, or is a very picky eater.
- **Substance use:** Your child is using alcohol or other drugs.
- **Unusual movements:** Your child has unintentional, sudden, repetitive movements like facial grimaces, eye blinking, head jerking, sniffing, or throat clearing.
- **Other adults' concerns:** Other trusted adults in the child's life, like teachers and grandparents, have noticed a significant worsening of your child's functioning.
- **Overall functioning:** Everyday life is a huge struggle, or you are worried about your child.

**Depending on your child's needs, their provider may recommend therapy and/or medication.** Here are some of the psychiatric medications most often prescribed to children and adolescents:

Type of Medication	Common Uses	Examples
Attention deficit hyperactivity	Attention problems, distractibility, hyperactivity	Methylphenidate Amphetamines Clonidine

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disorder medications		Guanfacine Strattera (atomoxetine) Qelbree (viloxazine)
Antidepressants	Depression, irritability, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder	Prozac (fluoxetine) Zoloft (sertraline) Lexapro (escitalopram)
Neuroleptics (also called antipsychotics)	Irritability, tantrums, aggression, and unstable mood. Also used to treat tics (involuntary movements or verbal outbursts), disorganized thinking, hallucinations, and delusions.	Risperdal (risperidone) Abilify (aripiprazole)
Mood stabilizers	Unstable mood, seizures (epilepsy), migraine headaches	Depakote (valproate) Lamictal (lamotrigine) Lithium
Sedatives	Severe sleep problems (used for limited periods of time in addition to behavioral interventions)	Melatonin Vistaril (hydroxyzine) Desyrel (trazodone)

## Questions to ask if your child is prescribed a psychiatric medication (source: AACAP\*):

- What information is available about the risks and benefits of this medication for my child?
- If the medication works well, what behavior changes will we see, and when?
- What side effects and drug interactions might occur, and how should we manage them?
- When and how should we take the medication? What should we do if we miss a dose?
- What information should we bring to our next appointment so we can evaluate whether the medication is working?
- Who will monitor my child's progress and adjust dosing? How often will we be seen for follow-up appointments?
- How long will my child be on this medication? How will we decide when to discontinue the medication?

## Additional Resources:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Parents' Medication Guides. [Parents' Medication Guides \(aacap.org\)](https://www.aacap.org/facts_for_families/parents_medication_guides)

\*AACAP Facts for Families. [Psychiatric Medication For Children And Adolescents Part III - Questions To Ask \(aacap.org\)](https://www.aacap.org/facts_for_families/psychiatric_medication_for_children_and_adolescents_part_iii_-_questions_to_ask)