What is the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service?

Helpful Information for Parents

This leaflet explains what happens when your child is referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Sometimes this is written as CAMHS. It is a specialist service for children and young people, and for you, their parents. We will also tell you what you can expect when your child is referred to CAMHS, who you and they will meet, and what the different jobs are of some of the people that you will meet.

Why will your child or young person have been referred to CAMHS?

From work that we have done with children and young people, we know that about one in ten of all young people in the UK have mental health problems that may need the help of specially trained staff.

While many children and young people have anxieties, worries or difficult feelings at some time while they are growing up, these are quite normal. With the support of their families and the people around them, these difficulties often pass with no lasting effect or need for specialist involvement.

But when your child or young person’s worries or problems do not go away or begin to seriously interfere with their everyday lives – for example, when they cannot eat or sleep; they can’t study; they stop talking to you and have no interest in their friends or school – that is when the CAMHS team can support them and give you professional help and advice.

There are many different types of mental health problems that children and young people can have. Some of the ones you may have heard of include:

- Depression
- Psychosis
- Eating disorders including anorexia and bulimia
- Self-harm
- Emotional problems

Understanding mental health problems and how you can help your child

One of the difficulties with mental health problems is that they can affect children and young people, and their families, in different ways and can last for different lengths of time. Mental health problems can also be hard to recognise, because the person suffering does not look different, and may also find it very difficult to talk about what they are feeling.

Because mental health problems are not as obvious as physical problems, it is really important that when you first meet someone from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service that you:

- **Ask them any questions** you might have about why your child has been asked to meet with the CAMHS team
- **Ask them to explain** about the mental health problem your child may have and how this might affect them
• **Tell them anything** – that you might have noticed about your child and for how long – this will help the CAMHS team to understand what is happening and what help your child might need.

• **Tell them** about the things that you are most concerned about.

• **Do not feel worried or embarrassed or even silly** that some of the things bothering you seem small - staff in CAMHS are trained to listen and consider everything and will not think you are being silly.

**What can you expect from CAMHS?**

All CAMHS work with children and young people up to the age of 16, although some offer help up to the age of 18. They will normally contact you the first time by letter to offer you an appointment. When the letter arrives it may be for just your child who is experiencing difficulties and you, their parents/carers, or it might ask for the whole family to attend.

You may also get a telephone call to see if you have received the letter and to check if you are able to attend the appointment.

It is not unusual to have to wait a few weeks from the letter to the date of the appointment, since many CAMHS teams are very busy. If while you are waiting for the appointment you think that your child’s difficulties are getting more serious, please let the CAMHS team know – they may be able to offer some suggestions of what to do to help your child while they are waiting for the appointment date.

CAMHS teams work in lots of different places including their own clinics, or someone may come to meet you at home or at your child’s school, or at your doctor’s surgery. Most appointments are in the day-time during the week, but where possible you will be offered times after school or college or in the evening.

At the first appointment, you and your child will meet one or two people working in the CAMHS team. Depending on the age of your child, they may also ask to see them on their own.

People working in CAMHS are all trained in mental health and include:

- Psychiatrists
- Nurses
- Social workers
- Psychologists
- Psychotherapists
- Family therapists
- Teachers
- Primary mental health workers
- Outreach workers

If you are unsure as to what the person you are meeting does, please make sure that you ask. They will be happy to answer your questions, and will want to get as much information as they can from you and your child at this first meeting so that they can plan with you and your child what help you might need. **This is an important time to ask any questions and to make sure that you understand what is being said to you.**
When they have spoken to you, they might suggest:

- Different forms of therapy
- Medication (though this is not common)
- The number of appointments your child will need. One or two might be enough – or sometimes your child will need weekly appointments for a few weeks
- The CAMHS team may suggest that your child needs to go in to hospital – **but this is rare** - in which case make sure you understand the reasons why and where you will need to go.

**Your and your children’s rights**

There are some important things that you can expect:

- **Confidentiality** - the person seeing you and your child should explain how and with whom any information you give might be shared
- **Consent** – the person seeing you should make sure that you and your child agree with the help they are suggesting and explain the possible choices if you do not agree
- **Your needs** – for example, if you or your family need help from an interpreter, or want to bring a trusted friend with you to appointments, or want information to be shared with you in a certain way, (e.g., written to take away with you) you should let the CAMHS staff know and they should try and organise this
- **Complaints** – if you are not happy with the help you have received, you should tell the CAMHS staff. All CAMHS have complaints procedures and you should be told what these are if you ask for them.