

Principles of Practice Regarding the Use of Psychotropic Medication under Age 6



A comprehensive mental health assessment includes:

- A comprehensive assessment of the full range of psychiatric symptoms and disorders, as well as impairment from these symptoms and disorders
- A full developmental assessment
- A full medical history
- An assessment of family psychiatric history which includes past and current history of parental psychiatric illnesses, substance abuse and treatment history of parents, parent figures (e.g., step parent) siblings, and other relatives.
- Assessment of family structure and functioning, parent-child relationship and interaction
- Assessment of environmental risk factors and stressors including history of abuse (physical, sexual, neglect), traumatic life events, domestic violence, economic instability, etc.

- Level 0:**
- Comprehensive multi-informant, multi-modal, multi-disciplinary assessment for those with positive screen.
 - Use of validated measures for assessing psychiatric symptoms and impairment in young children

Recommended measures of early childhood symptoms include:

- Ages 12-36 months: SDQ¹, ITSEA, and BITSEA²
- Ages 3-6 years: SDQ or ECI³

- Level 1:**
- Always start with psychosocial treatment. Parental involvement is essential.
 - Monitor response to indicate parental and family interventions using reliable and valid measures of changes in targeted symptoms of dysfunction.
 - Except in rare cases, try at least 12 week trial of psychosocial interventions before considering medication.

- Level 2:**
- If medications are being considered, first reassess diagnosis and diagnostic formulation.
- If a decision is made to initiate medication:**
- Start low, go slow
 - After 6-9 months, plan down titration trial to determine if the medication is still needed and effective, (taper or discontinuation trial).
 - Except in rare cases, use monotherapy
 - Continue psychosocial treatment during treatment with medication
 - Use of psychotherapeutic medication in children under the age of 24 months is not recommended unless there are rare and extenuating circumstances

¹ Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire, SDQ, (25 items) is available free of charge from www.sdqinfo.com

² Both ITSEA and BITSEA instruments are available for a fee from www.pearsonassess.com.

ITSEA has 166 items and takes 20-30 minutes to complete, BITSEA has 60 items and takes about 10 minutes.

³ The Early Childhood Inventory has 60 yes/no questions and is available for a fee from www.info@checkmateplus.com