

Why might medicine be recommended?

Medicine is sometimes recommended for these emotional and behavioral problems:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Common symptoms include short attention span, difficulty sitting still and trouble controlling impulses.

Depression. Common symptoms include lasting feelings of sadness, lack of energy, and changes in sleeping and eating habits. Thoughts of death or thoughts or plans to commit suicide can also occur.

Anxiety. Common symptoms include panic attacks, excessive worry, intense fear of specific things or situations, repetitive unwanted thoughts or actions, and upsetting thoughts about a traumatic event.

Severe aggression. Signs of severe aggression include assaulting others, excessive property damage or hurting oneself (head-banging or cutting).

What are common side effects of psychotropic medicines?

Psychotropic medicines may have serious, mild, or no side effects. Side effects vary for each person but may include:

- Stomach upset or headaches
- Changes in appetite and weight
- Sleepiness or sleep problems
- Nervousness, tearfulness, or irritability
- Disturbing thoughts including suicide
- Racing heart, dizziness, shakiness



If you are concerned about side effects contact your prescriber.

To Learn More About:

Trauma:

- ✓ *Resources for Parents and Caregivers (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)* at: <http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers>
- ✓ *Parenting a Child Who has Experienced Trauma (Child Welfare Information Gateway)* at: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/child-trauma.pdf>

Psychotropic Medicine:

- ✓ *Psychiatric Medication for Children and Adolescents (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry)* at: http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Psychiatric-Medication-For-Children-And-Adolescents-Part-How-Medications-Are-Used-021.aspx
- ✓ *Making Healthy Choices: Supporting Youth in Foster Care: A Guide for Caregivers and Caseworkers on Trauma, Treatment and Psychotropic Medication (Children's Bureau)* at: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/mhc-caregivers/>

Therapy:

- ✓ *Effective Child Therapy* at: <http://effectivechildtherapy.org/>

To get help connecting to services and supports, call:

- ✓ *Mental Health Association in Delaware* at: (302) 654-6833; 1-800-287-6423 (Kent and Sussex Counties)

This guide produced with the assistance of the following organizations:



A CAREGIVER'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATIONS



THIS PAMPHLET IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND MEDICATIONS THAT MAY BE PRESCRIBED FOR YOUR CHILD



What are psychotropic medicines?

Psychotropic medication may be recommended as part of your child's treatment plan. These medicines are used to treat children's emotional and/or behavioral problems. They are used to help children do better at home, in school, and in the community by controlling symptoms. These medicines are prescribed by a licensed professional, such as a Doctor or Nurse Practitioner.

Before recommending any medicine, the prescriber should work with you and your child to complete a comprehensive assessment. They should also discuss other strategies like individual and family counseling, physical activity, yoga, healthy eating, good sleep, etc.

 Medication should be only one part of a complete treatment plan.

The Impact of Trauma

Some children experience traumatic events like seeing violence in their home or community, being in foster care, separation from or death of parent or caregiver or living with parents who have mental, physical or substance abuse challenges. These events can cause traumatic stress.

- ✓ Traumatic stress symptoms can look like other emotional and behavioral problems.
- ✓ Tell the prescriber about traumatic events or situations affecting your child.
- ✓ Effective services are available to help children who have traumatic stress and should be tried before or with medication.

What is my role?

Here are some important steps you can take to make the best decisions about medicine:

Tell the prescriber about your opinions, observations and concerns about your child.

- The information you have to share will help the prescriber make the best decisions and recommendations for your child.

Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions of the prescriber recommending medicine.

- Information will help you make the best decisions for your child.

Help your child to be involved.

- Help your child be part of the discussion about recommendations and goals for taking medicine and the decision about whether to start, continue, or stop medicine.
- If medicine is prescribed, help your child share their opinion of how well the medicine is working and whether they are having any side effects.

Watch for side effects.

- Ask the prescriber about possible side effects for any medicine prescribed and what to do if they occur.

How do I decide whether my child should take medicine?

A recommendation for psychotropic medicine often raises questions and concerns on the part of parents and youth. Thinking of the word "**RARE**"* can help you make an informed decision. Each letter in the word represents a question to ask:

- What is the **REASON** for giving the medicine including the symptoms the medicine is supposed to help?
- What are the **ALTERNATIVES** to the treatment including other strategies or safer medicines that could be used instead?
- What are the **RISKS** or possible negative effects that can happen with this type of treatment?
- What are the **EXPECTATIONS** including improvements to my child's symptoms and common possible negative effects that should be monitored?

Below are some other questions to ask:

- How much and how often would my child take this medicine?
- Are there any lab tests (e.g. heart tests, blood tests, etc.) that should be done before starting or while taking this medicine?
- How will we know if the medicine is working?
- How long will my child need to take this medicine? How will the decision be made to stop this medicine?

*Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Children and Family Services. (February 2013). *Managing Psychotropic Medication Guide: Tips for Practice: Psychotropic Medication*. Retrieved from http://dhhs.ne.gov/children_family_services/Training/Documents/Managing%20Psychotropic%20Medication%20Guide.pdf