

Making Decisions About Psychotropic Medications

A Guide for Caregivers



Provided by



TEXAS

**Department of Family
and Protective Services**

Child Protective Services



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**This guide helps caregivers talk
to doctors about whether
to consent to treatment
with psychotropic medications.**





Foster Children and Psychotropic Medications

Most children in the custody of Child Protective Services (CPS) do not need psychotropic medications. But all abused or neglected children who are removed from their homes suffer emotional stress, and some act out in unhealthy ways.

Some children slowly heal and learn to control their behavior with patience, understanding, and clear and consistent rules.



When Psychotropic Medications are Needed

Of course, each child is unique. Some children need medication to help them get better.

Some may need it only briefly to relieve stress and deal with trauma.

Others may need psychotropic medications long-term to treat mental health disorders.

Psychotropic medications help some children feel better and function at home, in school, and in their daily lives.

A Complete Treatment Plan

However helpful psychotropic medications are, they're always part of a plan that includes other help such as therapy, consistent house rules, and teaching positive behavior.

Other Treatment Options

There may be other options to consider instead of psychotropic medications.

- **Talk about managing difficult behavior and helping the child deal with emotional stress** with the child's caseworker and child-placing agency (CPA) case manager or treatment team.
- **Ask about behavior intervention or trauma-informed care classes** that help you learn to manage a child's behavior.
- **Ensure all available behavioral health supports are in place**, consider mental health staffing with CPS mental health program specialists.
- **Find therapy** for the child and talk to the therapist about your concerns and how to get help.
- **Work with the child's therapist, school, CPA, caseworker, and others** to find interventions that work. Make sure you all use the same interventions.



Caregiver Participation

Always be at appointments about psychotropic medications.

The law requires medical consenters to take part in the child's health care appointments. But it is especially important for you to participate when psychotropic medications are discussed, prescribed, or monitored.

The doctor needs to know the child's history and how the child is doing to recommend treatment.

You have the right to refuse consent to a psychotropic medication for the child.

You need to talk to the doctor and ask questions to make the best decision before consenting to a psychotropic medication or other treatment.



Preparing for the Appointment

What to Say to the Child

Talk to the child about why they are seeing a doctor and their medications.

Use words children understand.

Talking helps children feel more in control, builds trust, and can make treatment more successful.

Encouraging the Child's Input

Encourage children to speak up for themselves.

If the child does not want to speak to the provider, recap their concerns and observations, and then ask the child if they have anything to add, or if anything was missed.

Children should have more input into decisions about psychotropic medications as they get older. But as the medical consentor, you must decide based on what is best for the child.

The child's caseworker will keep the child's parents informed about medications their child is taking.



What to Share with the Doctor

Be ready to tell the doctor about the child's emotions, behaviors, and symptoms. Let the child share concerns with the doctor.

- What is the child's story? Can the child tell you what is wrong?
- Did something new happen to upset the child?
- How is the child doing in school, with friends, when visiting with family?
- What behaviors concern you and where do they happen?
- How often do these behaviors happen and how long do they last? Are these behaviors mild, moderate, severe?

- What have you tried to deal with these behaviors? What worked or didn't work?
- How consistent are these interventions?
- Is the child getting therapy and is it helping?
- Is the child taking any medication? Have they helped? Were they taken as prescribed? Any side effects?



What to Bring to the Doctor's Visit

Gather and bring important information to the doctor's visit like:

- Evaluations (psychological, educational, developmental, etc.).
- A list of any medications the child takes or has taken in the past (see the child's Health Passport).
- The child's abuse and neglect history and placement history.
- The medical and mental health history of the child and birth family, if available.
- Contact information for the child's primary care physician, CPS or the Single Source Continuum Contractor, therapist, or other providers.





At the Appointment

When Medication is Not Prescribed

Doctors won't prescribe psychotropic medication in every case.

There are many reasons why a doctor may not prescribe psychotropic medication.

A doctor may need more information or want to try other things first—perhaps a special type of therapy.



When Medication is Prescribed

If the doctor recommends medication, let the child talk about any concerns.

Questions to ask the doctor:

- Are there other things to try first?
Why is this the best treatment? Has it helped others with similar conditions?
- What's the medication called? Does it have other names?
- What symptoms does it treat? How long before it works? What are the side effects?
- Is this medication addictive? Can it be abused?

- What is the dose? How often should the child take it?
- Does the child need lab tests before or while taking the medication?
- Does the child need to avoid any food, medications, or activities?
- How long will the child need to take this medication? How do we decide when to stop?
- What do I do if the child becomes ill, misses doses, or has side effects?
- Do I need to tell my child's school or day care about this medication?





**Always read
and keep the
medication information
the pharmacy provides
when you fill a
prescription.**

Taking Multiple Psychotropic Medications

If the child is prescribed psychotropic medication and is already taking another one, ask the doctor:

- Does the child finish the old medication before starting the new one?
- Does the child keep taking both the old and new medications? For how long?

Mandatory 90-Day Checkups

A child taking psychotropic medication **must** have a checkup every 90 days.

Caregiver Responsibilities

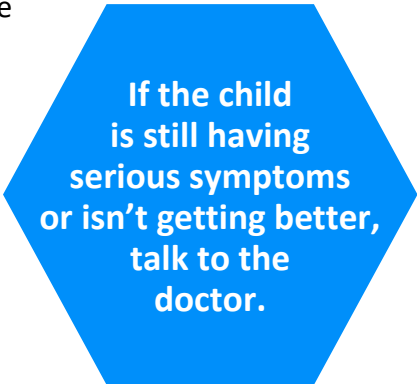
As the child's caregiver, you **must**:

- Take any child on a psychotropic medication to the prescribing doctor at least every 90 days.
- Talk to the doctor about how the child is doing.
- Take the child for any regular lab work the doctor has requested before the follow-up visits.



What to Share with the Doctor at the 90-Day Checkups

Be sure to give the child a chance to share concerns and ask questions.



If the child is still having serious symptoms or isn't getting better, talk to the doctor.

Talk to the doctor about:

- How the medication is working.
- Any changes in behavior, mood, appetite, sleep, or school performance.
- Anything new in the child's life that could upset them.
- Changes in how the child gets along with others.
- Any suspicions about alcohol or drug abuse or any other concerns.
- Any side effect the child has, including weight gain or loss.
- Therapy and other interventions you are trying.
- How much longer will the child need the medication.

What to Bring to the 90-Day Checkups

For the 90-day checkup visits, take with you:

- Any new medical, psychological, developmental, or educational evaluations.
- Any new medical history.
- A list of all the child's current medications and dosages.





When Issues Happen Between the 90-Day Checkups

When you have problems or concerns between visits, contact the prescribing doctor, especially if:

- You have any concerns about side effects.
- The child is not getting better or is getting worse.
- The child is a danger to themselves or others.

STAR Health

After you speak with your doctor, if you still have concerns contact STAR Health, the Medicaid program specifically for children, youth, and young adults in the care of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

STAR Health provides:

- Comprehensive medical (physical, dental, and eye care).
- Behavioral health (psychological and therapy) services.

**Still Have
Concerns?**

**Contact STAR Health
Member Services**

866-912-6283



Medication Prescribing Review

STAR Health continually monitors all psychotropic medication prescribing and will conduct a formal review if the prescribing is not within recommended guidelines.

A formal review includes:

- Examining medical records.
- A discussion between a STAR Health child psychiatrist and the prescribing doctor.
- A written report from the STAR Health psychiatrist.

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