

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 108

April 2013

Telepsychiatry and Your Child

Telepsychiatry is the use of videoconferencing to provide psychiatric evaluation, consultation and treatment. This technology is used by a child and adolescent psychiatrist to provide care to a patient (a child or teen and a parent) at a distant location. High quality audio and video can make a telepsychiatry consultation seem almost like an in-person appointment.

Why use telepsychiatry?

Some youth who struggle with mental health problems do not live near a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health expert. It is difficult for many families to travel to a distant city to get the help they need. Sometimes, their doctor or counselor requests a telepsychiatry consultation from a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Telepsychiatry is also sometimes used in emergency room settings.

How does telepsychiatry work?

Telepsychiatry appointments are similar to regular doctor visits except that the doctor and patient are in different locations. A staff member or therapist may also be present to participate in the appointment with the youth and parent. Both locations will have a television screen or computer monitor that allows two-way communication.

What are the benefits of telepsychiatry?

The main benefit is that youth obtain expert care that is not available near their homes. Telepsychiatry also helps to minimize the inconvenience and costs of traveling to distant cities, especially if the youth needs ongoing visits. The psychiatrist can also consult with other professionals taking care of the youth, such as the primary care physician, therapist, or teacher. Telepsychiatry usually does not cost more than an in-person visit.

Will telepsychiatry be as effective as regular visits?

Research with adults shows that telepsychiatry is just as effective as treatment provided in-person. Research with youth and families is just beginning. It shows that children, families and referring doctors are very satisfied with the care received through telepsychiatry. Treatment recommendations, prescriptions, and laboratory tests can be coordinated by the telepsychiatrist or the referring doctor's office.

Do telepsychiatrists get special training?

Most telepsychiatrists learn from other telepsychiatrists, or staff at the medical center, or from a company that hires them to provide telepsychiatry services. There is no state or national certificate. Recently, practice guidelines have been developed by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and by the American Telemedicine Association.

Will my insurance cover telepsychiatry?

Insurance coverage for telepsychiatry varies by state. Parents should ask their local clinic, insurance provider, or psychiatrist. It is important to let the insurance company know that there are no available child and adolescent psychiatry resources in the area, and that telepsychiatry is not telephone therapy.

Below are some questions to ask before starting telepsychiatry to learn how the consultation or treatment will proceed:

- Why is telepsychiatry being recommended for my child and how will it help?
- What are other treatment alternatives and how do they compare?
- Is this a one-time consultation or will my child be in ongoing treatment?
- How much will it cost and how will the services be paid?
- What are the arrangements for laboratory tests and prescriptions?
- What happens if there is an emergency?
- How will my child's privacy be protected?
- Is the technology secure?
- What happens if the equipment doesn't work?

Consultation and ongoing treatment with a child and adolescent psychiatrist using telepsychiatry can be very helpful for many children and adolescents. If parents still have questions or doubts, they can ask the referring provider, the telepsychiatrist, or they can seek a consultation for a second opinion.

For additional information, see *Facts for Families*:

[#00: The Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist](#)

[#52: Comprehensive Psychiatric Evaluation](#)

[#21: Psychiatric Medication for Children and Adolescents: Part I](#)

[#29: Psychiatric Medication for Children and Adolescents: Part II](#)

[#51: Psychiatric Medication for Children and Adolescents: Part III](#)

[#86: Psychotherapies for Children and Adolescents](#)

If you find *Facts for Families*® helpful and would like to make good mental health a reality, consider donating to the [Campaign for America's Kids](#). Your support will help us continue to produce and distribute Facts for Families, as well as other vital mental health information, free of charge.

You may also mail in your contribution. Please make checks payable to the AACAP and send to *Campaign for America's Kids*, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, DC 20090.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 8,500 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

Facts for Families© information sheets are developed, owned and distributed by AACAP. Hard copies of Facts sheets may be reproduced for personal or educational use without written permission, but cannot be included in material presented for sale or profit. All Facts can be viewed and printed from the AACAP website (www.aacap.org). Facts sheets may not be reproduced, duplicated or posted on any other website without written consent from AACAP. Organizations are permitted to create links to AACAP's website and specific Facts sheets. For all questions please contact the AACAP Communications & Marketing Coordinator, ext. 154.

If you need immediate assistance, please dial 911.

Copyright © 2013 by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.