

# Medication for mental health struggles in adolescents.

Information to help you decide when to start or adjust medications.



UR  
MEDICINE

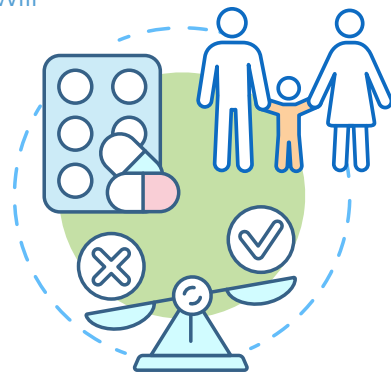
GOLISANO  
CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

## Considering starting or changing your adolescent's medication?

If your adolescent is facing behavioral health challenges, you may be considering starting them on a medication, switching to a new one, or adjusting doses. Medication is a valuable tool for managing behavioral health disorders. Often, combining medication and therapy is recommended as the most effective treatment.

However, there are many factors to think about before you decide which medication is best.

The best approach to treatment will depend on your adolescent's unique situation. Adolescents and families are diverse, and symptoms are complex. Being as informed as possible can help you make the best choice for their treatment.



## What steps should you take as a parent?

An important step you can take toward making this decision is to gather information. Resources include family members, school, other providers, and your adolescent.

Follow these steps to help you make an informed decision:

- Gather information on your family's mental health history, including diagnoses, and response to medications (e.g. benefits and side effects).
- Take notes about your own concerns and observations about your youth's behavior.
- Get your adolescent's input regarding their experience and preference with medication.

### When to consider starting or changing your adolescent's medication.

As a parent, you want the best for your youth, and deciding whether to start or change medication can be tough. If your adolescent is struggling with mental health issues, considering medication is an appropriate step, and with the right support, you can find a treatment that is helpful.

If your adolescent is struggling with any of the following, starting or altering medications may help.

- Problematic behaviors
- Low self-esteem
- School issues
- Home-life conflicts
- Safety concerns
- Daily functioning
- Social interactions
- Lack of response to current medications
- Side effects to current medications

With the right medication, your adolescent may see **significant improvements** in these challenging areas of their life.

Additionally, medication may be necessary if your adolescent's behavior has not improved with other methods such as therapy, school intervention, and home/parenting strategies.

### WHICH CONDITIONS CAN BE TREATED WITH MEDICATION?

Medications may be helpful in treating many issues, including:

- ADHD
- Anxiety
- OCD
- PTSD/trauma
- Depression
- Bipolar disorder
- Psychosis
- Anger/severe aggression
- Sleep problems

## When it comes to medication, keep in mind that:

- Some medications begin to work quickly, many may take longer
- For most medications, we tend to “start low and go slow”
- Response can vary based on the individual, and medication changes may be needed
- Some medications will work well for some adolescents and not for others
- Medications may not fully resolve the condition, but can often help manage ongoing symptoms which can support recovery
- Dosing may be based on symptoms, age, and/or size
- Dosage and/or frequency may need to be adjusted
- As needed, medications may be suggested to treat intermittent anxiety/agitation
- If your adolescent has been struggling for an extended amount of time, medication intervention may be needed to initiate relief and movement toward recovery
- Therapy can often be more successful in combination with medications
- Sleep impairment can significantly worsen the adolescent’s level of function – a short-term medication intervention to help address sleep, in addition to initiating sleep hygiene routines, may be recommended

Remember that medication is **only one tool of many** in our mental health toolbox, and other methods are usually needed to help patients fully manage their condition and symptoms. Often, **therapy and medication are combined** to create the most effective treatment plan for the individual.

## Intake and Evaluation.

If your adolescent is entering the partial hospitalization service, they will complete an intake assessment prior to admission and will receive a psychiatric evaluation with the psychiatrist and psychiatric nurse practitioner after admission.

### The intake assessment entails:

- Comprehensive evaluation, taking in all factors of a patient’s life
- Chart review, including all past treatments and medication
- Meeting with the adolescent
- Obtaining previous rating scales and/or testing
- Discussions with parents/guardians, current outpatient providers, school, etc.



## What your adolescent can expect during the psychiatric evaluation process:

The psychiatrist and nurse practitioner will meet with the youth and focus on refining diagnoses and treatment recommendations by asking additional questions and clarifying those discussed during the intake assessment.

The medication team will explain diagnoses and treatment recommendations, including whether medications could be helpful. This discussion will also include questions about:

- Family, school and relationships
- Medical issues
- Health habits, such as sleep, eating, and exercise
- Informed consent and agreement by both parent/guardian and adolescent – discussion of the risks, side effects, benefits, and alternative treatment options before any medications are started or adjusted

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR ASSIGNED NURSE PRACTITIONER.

Remember, you and your adolescent can ask questions at any time during enrollment in the program by contacting your assigned nurse practitioner.

Here are some questions you may want to ask before deciding on a medication:

- What is the name of the medication? Is it known by other names?
- How may the medication help my adolescent? When will it start to work?
- What side effects commonly occur with this medication?
- Is this medication addictive? Can it be abused?
- What is the recommended dosage? How often will the medication be taken?
- Are there any laboratory tests that need to be done before or while my adolescent begins taking the medication?
- How often will progress be checked and by whom? Will dose changes be necessary?
- Are there any other medications or foods which my adolescent should avoid while taking the medication?
- What do I do if a problem develops (e.g. if my adolescent becomes ill, doses are missed, or side effects develop)?
- Does my adolescent's school or school nurse need to be informed about this medication?
- How long will my adolescent need to take this medication? How will the decision be made to stop or change this medication?

## Getting your adolescent's medication.

Once a medication is agreed upon:

The nurse practitioner will electronically send a prescription to your identified pharmacy for pick-up.

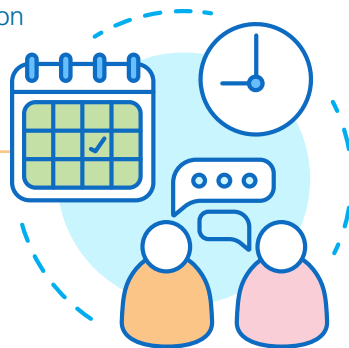
Prescriptions will then be provided as needed while in the program, and on the day of discharge, a prescription for 30 days will be given. After discharge from the CAPHS program, we can no longer provide refills.

We will arrange for medication management following discharge with a PCP or psychiatric provider to continue ongoing assessment of the adolescent's response to the medications and to continue prescribing the medication.

### **HELP YOUR ADOLESCENT TAKE THEIR MEDICATION SAFELY.**

To help your adolescent take their medication safely, follow these recommendations:

- Parents/caregivers are expected to administer medication and monitor their adolescent while taking it
- Keep all medications out of reach of your adolescent
- Get into a routine and include the adolescent in the routine (e.g., parent using a pill organizer to keep track of whether pills were administered each day)
- Set an alarm on your phone, or your adolescent's phone if they have one. Many apps are available on smartphones to help track administration and monitor symptoms
- Plan ahead to get refills to prevent running out of medication
- Do not stop the medication without talking to your youth's provider first





We're here to help you make the best decision.

Making decisions about medication isn't easy, but we're here to help you make the best choice for your adolescent. When it comes to your youth's treatment, remember to:

Be informed.

Be an advocate.

Include your adolescent.



For more information, please call  
(585) 273-1776.

**UR Medicine Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Child and Adolescent Partial Hospitalization Service**

1860 South Avenue, Second Floor  
Rochester, NY 14620  
(585) 273-1776  
Fax: (585) 273-1386

[Golisano.urmc.edu/behavioralhealth](http://Golisano.urmc.edu/behavioralhealth)

[www.urmc.rochester.edu/  
childrens-hospital/behavioral-health-wellness/partial-hospitalization](http://www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/behavioral-health-wellness/partial-hospitalization)

Part of Strong Memorial Hospital.



**UR | GOLISANO**  
MEDICINE | CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

MEDICINE *of* THE HIGHEST ORDER