

**Mental Health Services Checklist:
A Family/Caregiver Tool for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities**

This checklist is intended to help you better understand mental health, accessing services, assessment of mental health conditions, and treatment options. It is designed to help you communicate with primary care and mental health professionals and advocate for your family member's needs. This checklist may be used by both family members and caregivers, though for ease of writing, we use only the former.

**The Los Angeles Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Tools
for Assessing Quality of Services Project: Developing Quality Indicators
for Individuals with Dual Diagnosis.**

Access

There will likely be several steps before your family member can get a mental health evaluation. The following questions evaluate how easy it is to access mental health care.

- When your family member showed mental health symptoms and you reported it to your primary doctor or regional center case manager, did you **get a referral** to a mental health professional?
- Was the **referral given within a month** of you first bringing this issue to your doctor's or service coordinator's attention?
- Was your family member able **to contact a primary doctor or mental health professional** for a mental health evaluation **within a month** of receiving your family member's referral?

Assessment

The following questions are intended to help prepare you for what might be included in the assessment, and help guide your discussions with your doctor or mental health professional.

- Did the primary doctor or mental health professional explain the method(s) of evaluating your family member for a mental health condition (e.g., assessments)?
- Did the primary doctor or mental health professional ask about your family member's...
 - Means of communication (e.g., sign language, PECS, augmentative communication)?

- Any difficulties in your family member's functioning (e.g., activities of daily living such as grooming, preparing meals, traveling away from your home)?
- Social or functioning strengths (e.g., able to maintain friendships once begun)?
- Stressors that may trigger an unwanted reaction (e.g., transition between activities causes melt-downs)?
- Impact of mental health symptoms on life functioning (e.g., at work, day program, school, home)?
- Prior history of mental health care (e.g. ever seeing a therapist or psychiatrist before)?
- Prior strategies or approaches to deal with the problems (e.g., using headphones when going into loud or stressful places, breathing exercises)?
- Environmental changes (e.g., moving, changing caregivers, divorce, death in the family)?
- History of prior speech, occupational, physical therapy?
- History of prior psychiatric medications?
- Current medications?
- Developmental history?
- Medical history?

- To make sure a comprehensive assessment was done, did the primary doctor or mental health professional ask about any...
 - History of abuse (physical and/or sexual)?
 - History of aggression?
 - History of self-injurious behavior (like head banging, punching self, etc.)?
 - Thoughts or attempts of suicide?
- Did the doctor or mental health professional ask about your family's full medical and mental health history?
- Within the first 3 months of getting mental health services, was your family member able to get...?
 - A mental health examination (e.g., mental health or psychiatric evaluation)?
 - A physical examination (e.g., checkup or doctor visit)?
 - A follow-up plan?

Treatment

How do you know if your family member is making progress? One of the first steps in monitoring your family member's progress is to make sure you are knowledgeable about and understand the treatment plan, which may include therapy and/or medication. Questions you might want to think about include:

- During the first 6 months of treatment, does the doctor or mental health professional talk about...?
 - At least one treatment goal for your family member?
 - Your family member's progress in meeting that goal?

- Within the first 3 months of mental health visits, was at least one of the following provided?
 - A recommendation for a particular type of therapy/program that would be good for your family member (e.g. cognitive behavior therapy, behavior therapy, art therapy, family therapy, Positive Parenting Program also called triple P, Seeking Safety program, etc.)?
 - At least one psychotherapy session?
 - A reason for not recommending psychotherapy?

Although medication should not automatically be considered to be the first choice in treatment, some people's mental health problems are so severe that medication may be necessary to protect them from serious harm and help them in daily life. If the doctor recommends medication, it is important to find out everything you can about the risks and benefits of the medication. Here are some questions that can help guide you through this process.

- Prior to starting any new psychiatric medication, were you or your family member asked for "informed consent" (e.g., explaining risks, benefits & alternatives to the medication and asking for agreement)?
- When prescribing a new psychiatric medication, does the doctor...?
 - Talk about the target symptom(s) that medication is supposed to help?
 - Explain the reason for the medication and possible side effects?

Antipsychotic medications are prescribed as treatment for aggressive or challenging behavior to people with developmental disabilities and are also prescribed for mental health conditions of psychosis or schizophrenia. It is very important for your doctor to explain why your family member will be taking these drugs, since antipsychotics can cause very serious side effects ranging from extreme weight gain to uncontrollable movement disorders to diabetes. Here are a few questions that can help guide your discussion with your doctor about this issue.

- When prescribing a new antipsychotic medication, does the doctor ...?
 - Measure your family member's height and weight or BMI?
 - Check lab tests for high cholesterol or diabetes?
 - Check for extrapyramidal symptoms or signs (e.g., uncontrolled or involuntary movements)?
- If your family member is regularly prescribed an antipsychotic medication, does the doctor continue to...?
 - Measure your family member's height and weight or BMI at least once?
 - Check lab tests for high cholesterol or diabetes?
- Check for extrapyramidal symptoms or signs (e.g. uncontrolled or involuntary movements)

- During every follow-up, does your doctor ask about or explain the following about the medication?
 - name
 - frequency
 - dosage
 - side effects
 - A follow-up plan for the medication (e.g., continue with, change, or stop the medication)
- If **two** antipsychotic medications are prescribed **at the same time**, did the doctor give you and your family member a clear explanation for prescribing both medications?
- When any psychiatric medication is stopped, did the doctor or mental health professional explain the reason for discontinuing the medication to you and your family member?