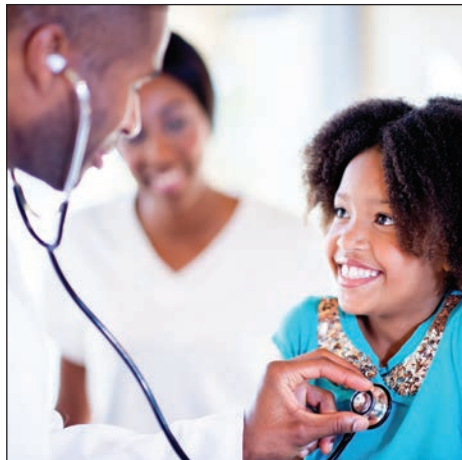


# THE ADVANTAGES OF PROVIDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES IN PRIMARY CARE PEDIATRICS



## PRIMARY CARE AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Early development of cognitive skills, emotional well-being, social competence, and sound physical and mental health are critical to children's overall health and well-being. But opportunities for promoting children's social and emotional development in primary care settings, where children are most commonly treated, are often missed.

- Children experience mental health problems but few have access to psychological services.
- Children sometimes struggle with their emotions, but these struggles may not develop into a diagnosable mental disorder.
- Nearly 13% of all children qualify for an individual education plan in public schools, which can include a range of instructional and therapy services.
- Few children have access to resources that promote social and emotional skills or help prevent problems before they start.
- Parents have a range of questions regarding child development that require expert advice.

## THE ROLE OF PEDIATRIC PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS IN CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Treatment for mental health issues in children is increasingly provided by pediatricians and family physicians. In the past 20 years, the rate of psychosocial problems identified by primary care providers has more than doubled—from 7% to 19%.

- Primary care providers have taken on greater roles in children's mental health services but may lack the time and skills to fully address children's social and emotional needs.
- Well-intentioned primary care physicians can disrupt their patient schedules when addressing a child's mental health concerns in an extended visit.
- Referral of children for mental health assessment and treatment may result in frustration due to inadequate communication between primary care and mental health systems.
- When children are referred to an external mental health provider, less than half of their families follow through on the referrals.

*"What it has allowed me to do is see patients more efficiently and more effectively, and that's a big plus when you're working in a primary care office."*

Hal Byck, MD  
Nemours DuPont Pediatrics  
Integrated practice since 2003

## Roles of Pediatric Primary Care Clinicians in Children's Mental Health Services



## INTEGRATED CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Given the complexities of addressing children's mental health by primary care providers, new models for integrating child development and mental health services into primary care have emerged. These models include:

- Training primary care providers in child development issues and mental health disorders
- Consultation by mental health providers to primary care providers
- Co-location of pediatric mental health providers within primary care practices

Studies indicate that high-quality mental health services located in primary care are multidisciplinary, collaborative, and more effective than traditional services.

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### The advantages of co-location of mental health providers in primary care settings include:

- Decreased use of general health care services by children with unidentified and untreated mental health problems, resulting in improved outcomes and reduced costs
- Increased confidence among primary care providers to explore mental health concerns
- Less stigma for families seeking mental health care
- Increased likelihood that families will seek timely well-child care
- Improved parenting practices that promote child development
- Enhanced communication among mental health and primary care providers
- Increased exchange of knowledge and skills between mental health and primary care disciplines
- Improved behavioral health outcomes in children and adolescents when compared with traditional silo models of care



Interested in APA's **Psychologists in Integrated Health Care** video or more information on integrated health care?

#### Please contact:

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#### Want to locate a child psychologist in your area?

Contact your state psychological association. Find them by visiting <http://www.apa.org/about/apa/organizations/associations.aspx> or Contact APA Division 54: Society of Pediatric Psychology (APAdiv54@gmail.com)

Sources for the facts in this document can be found on the APA website at <http://www.apa.org/health/pediatrics.aspx>



## UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGISTS TO PEDIATRIC PRIMARY CARE

Psychologists are uniquely equipped to be integrated into pediatric practices. They can:

- administer and interpret screening and/or assessment tools to identify a mental health problem;
- offer therapy for adolescent substance abuse, unhealthy behaviors, and developmental concerns that arise in a pediatric visit; and
- coordinate medical, therapy, and educational services with school psychologists to optimize each child's outcome.

Licensed clinical psychologists are independent mental health professionals who bill for services using health and behavior codes as well as mental health therapy codes for children with a diagnosable mental illness. Pediatric practices interested in integrating psychologists into their care team have less financial risk to absorb.

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