The Role of Evidence-Based Practices in Consumer Care: A Family Perspective
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During the past year, one in eight adolescents received treatment or counseling in a specialty mental health setting for problems with behavior or emotions. Because so many adolescents use mental health services, parents need to know about the type of treatment(s) available. If your child is receiving or is referred for counseling in a mental health setting, you will probably hear about Evidence-Based Practices (EBP’s). This article provides information about EBPs.

To be classified as an EBP, a treatment must be studied in an academic or community setting. The treatment must also produce positive outcomes in at least two studies which were conducted by more than one research team. EBPs are supported by evidence, but some mental health providers still use methods that have not yet been studied. This is due, in part, to agreement among counselors that based on their experience; those methods are very effective even though they lack evidence. For example, most counselors agree that a strong trusting relationship between the clinician and family is important yet that is hard to “prove” experimentally.

Many parents want information about their child’s treatment. Knowledge can help empower the families to choose, support and monitor their child’s treatment. Asking questions of the provider is one way to learn more. Here are some questions to ask about mental health treatment:

What are the risks and benefits associated with the recommended treatment?
Why are you recommending this treatment and what are the alternative treatments, if any?
Is there research showing that the recommended treatment works for families like ours?
What training and experience do you have with the recommended treatment?
How does the recommended treatment work and what is involved?
How do we measure and monitor the progress?

There are many different methods used in psychotherapy and many medications prescribed by psychiatrists. Knowing about them and whether they are supported by research broadens the opportunities for families to understand and to be partners in their child’s treatment.


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