

Psychotropic Medication

YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

PRIOR TO MEDICATION PRESCRIPTION

The youth should have a thorough diagnostic evaluation, which may include:

- A physical exam
- Psychological testing/psychiatric evaluation
- Laboratory tests
- Other medical tests, such as EKG, EEG

QUESTIONS FOR THE CLINICIAN

- What is the name of the medication? Is it known by other names? Is there paperwork with more information on this medication?
- What is the youth's diagnosis? Reason for recommending the medication?
- What other medications is the youth on and how do the medications interact?
- Are there any laboratory tests (e.g. heart tests, blood test, etc.) which need to be done before the youth begins taking the medication? Will any tests need to be done while the youth is taking the medication?
- How will the medication help the youth (potential benefits)? When will it start to work?
- What are possible risks and side effects that commonly occur with this medication?
- What do I do if a problem develops (e.g. if the youth becomes ill, doses are missed, or side effects develop)? When do I need to call the clinician?
- How long will the youth need to take this medication? How will the decision be made to stop this medication?
- How often will progress be checked and by whom? Will dose changes be necessary?
- What other modes of treatment or intervention are recommended (counseling/therapy)?

CAREGIVER ACTION STEPS

- See this as a team effort.
 - Managing youth's care is a shared responsibility. Important partners in this task include the biological family, social work agency, mental health clinician and/or physician. Also keep in mind that the school should be informed. When it comes to managing medications, it is very important that the team work with someone with special expertise in this area (a child and adolescent psychiatrist or prescriber trained in children's mental health).
- Be sure you have the information you need.
 - Communicate regularly with the child's social work case manager, mental health provider and/or clinician to make sure you have a current list of all of the youth's prescriptions and dosages. You can contact the pharmacy for a complete list of the youth's medications.
- Watch for side effects.

- Different psychotropic medication can cause different side effects so it's important that you are familiar with the possible side effects for the specific medication prescribed.
- Document and communicate.
 - Track and log any changes you see in the youth's behavior, wellness, or functioning, especially when a medication has just been introduced or an adjustment has been made.
- Remember that medication usually works best when used in combination with therapy.
 - When it comes to treating anxiety, depression, or other mental health needs, medication alone is sometimes not as effective as medication in combination with therapy.
- Listen to the youth.
 - Children and youth are a great source of information about their medications and how well they are working. Follow up with the youth periodically to see if they have noticed a difference in themselves.

CONSIDERATIONS

The decision to use psychotropic medication should never be made lightly. Medication should only be one part of a comprehensive treatment plan with ongoing medical assessment and, in most cases, individual and/or family psychotherapy.

Refer to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry for more information.