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Psychiatric Medication For Children And Adolescents Part III - Questions To Ask

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Medication can be an important part of treatment for some psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents. Psychiatric medication should only be used as one part of a comprehensive treatment plan. Ongoing evaluation and monitoring by a physician is essential. Parents and guardians should be provided with complete information when psychiatric medication is recommended. Children and adolescents should be included in appropriate parts of the discussion about medications, using words they understand. By asking questions, including those that follow, children, adolescents, and their parents will gain a better understanding of psychiatric medications:

1. What is the name of the medication? Is it known by other names?
2. What is known about its helpfulness with other children who have a similar condition to my child?
3. How will the medication help my child? When will it start to work?
4. What side effects commonly occur with this medication?
5. Is this medication addictive? Can it be abused?
6. What is the recommended dosage? How often will the medication be taken?
7. Are there any laboratory tests (e.g. heart tests, blood test, etc.) which need to be done before my child begins taking the medication? Will any tests need to be done while my child is taking the medication?
8. How often will progress be checked and by whom? Will dose changes be necessary?
9. Are there any other medications or foods which my child should avoid while taking the medication?
10. Are there interactions between this medication and other medications (prescription and/or over-the-counter) my child is taking?
11. Are there any activities that my child should avoid while taking the medication? Are any precautions recommended for other activities?

12. How long will my child need to take this medication? How will the decision be made to stop this medication?
13. What do I do if a problem develops (e.g. if my child becomes ill, doses are missed, or side effects develop)?
14. What is the cost of the medication (generic vs. brand name)?
15. Does my child's school nurse need to be informed about this medication?

Treatment with psychiatric medications is a serious matter for parents, children, and adolescents. Parents should ask these questions before their child or adolescent starts taking psychiatric medications. Parents and children/adolescents need to be fully informed about medications. If, after asking these questions, parents still have serious questions or doubts about medication treatment, they should feel free to ask for a second opinion by a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

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The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 9,400 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

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