

Parents are usually the first to recognize that their child has difficulties with emotions or behavior. However, it's not always apparent that professional help is necessary.

If you are worried about your child's emotions or behavior, you can start by first talking to family members, your child's school counselor, or your child's pediatrician about your concerns. If you think your child needs help, you should get as much information as possible about where to find help for your child.

The behavioral health system can sometimes be complicated and difficult for parents to understand. Different communities provide different types of treatment programs and services for children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral difficulties. A complete range of programs and services is called a continuum of care.

The beginning point for parents should be an evaluation by a qualified mental health professional such as a child and adolescent psychiatrist or licensed psychologist. Your child's primary care physician may be able to refer you to a mental health provider. Your child's diagnosis should be made based on professional observation and evaluation, information provided by the family and other experts, behavioral checklists, developmental screenings, and the criteria found in the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM). The evaluation should include a comprehensive look at all aspects of your child's life including in school, with family, with friends, and in the community. At the conclusion of the evaluation, the professional may recommend a certain type of service(s) or treatment from the continuum available locally.

Behavioral health treatment is often paid for by private health insurance. Many health insurance companies cover treatment such as evaluations, outpatient therapy, inpatient hospitalization, partial hospitalization programs, drug and alcohol treatment, and some residential treatment.

**Continued on back**

For children with an autism spectrum disorder, the private health insurance may cover additional services as well under a new law “Pennsylvania Autism Insurance Act 62”. For additional information, request Act 62 information using the enclosed resource order form or if you have internet access visit [www.PAAutismInsurance.org](http://www.PAAutismInsurance.org) which has information for families, insurers, and providers.

If your child is not covered by private health insurance, or if your child requires a type of treatment that is not paid for by private health insurance (e.g. Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services, Family Based treatment, Strengths Based treatment, and Multi-Systemic Therapy) the state of Pennsylvania may provide coverage for your child through the medical assistance program. You may be eligible to obtain medical assistance insurance for your child.

Medical Assistance (MA) will pay for many of the behavioral health services your child may need. In order to become eligible for MA, you must first show proof that you applied for federal assistance (Social Security's program of Supplemental Security Income- SSI). "Proof" is in the form of either an acceptance letter or denial letter from SSI.

- Contact your local Social Security office and ask to apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). You can begin the application process online at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov). Eligibility for SSI is income based.
- You will need to have
  - Child's social security number
  - Your social security number
  - Child's birth certificate
  - Income verification
  - And your child's psychological evaluation along with any other pertinent medical records
- If your child is accepted, ask for an introductory acceptance letter. It can take up to 90 days to start receiving SSI payments.
- **A denial of SSI (because of income) does not mean your child will be denied Medical Assistance (MA)/ACCESS.**
- If your child meets the disability criteria but is denied due to your income, request a copy of the denial letter to share with the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) County Assistance Office.
- Contact your local County Assistance Office (CAO) to begin the application process for medical assistance. Inform your CAO office that you are applying for a child with disabilities. If you have internet access, you can apply on-line at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us) or you can download the application.
- Fill out the form completely. Parental income must be listed, even though it is not considered when making a determination of the eligibility of the child. If your child receives income, such as SSI, that information also needs to be listed.

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- It is helpful to write on the top of the application and highlight the following: “MA FOR DISABLED CHILD HANDBOOK SECTION 355.4”. Commonly referred to as “loophole insurance”.
- If you need assistance completing the forms, contact your local County Assistance Office.
- You will need to mail the following information:
  - Completed application
  - A copy of your child’s social security card
  - A copy of your child’s birth certificate
  - A copy of written documentation of diagnosis from the doctor (evaluation)
- Within 5 to 7 days you should receive an eligibility notice. The notice will have your child’s ten digit MA/ACCESS recipient number. You will also receive your child’s MA card shortly thereafter.
- If you are enrolled in HealthChoices, you will receive a handbook in a pink envelope in the mail. This is your Value Behavioral Health-PA (VBH-PA) handbook. Value Behavioral Health-PA is the behavioral health managed care organization (MCO) for fourteen (14) western Pennsylvania counties.

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In most areas, you could call your local county MH/MR office or Service Coordination Unit and ask someone to open a case for your child. You will need to ask for an “intake interview”. A Case Manager or Support Coordinator will help you coordinate services for your son/daughter and may attend interagency team meetings necessary to plan for your child’s treatment.

Everyone on Medical Assistance (MA) has an ACCESS card. Many people on MA are in a HealthChoices program (Pennsylvania’s Waiver program to provide mandatory managed health care to Medical Assistance recipients) which means they are enrolled in a Managed Care Organization (MCO) and get their healthcare through the MCO. Value Behavioral Health of PA (VBH-PA) is the MCO for fourteen (14) western Pennsylvania counties.

If you are not enrolled in HealthChoices, you can access mental health services by calling the county MH/MR program. You will either be scheduled for an assessment or given the names of at least two mental health providers to call directly for an evaluation.

As a HealthChoices member, the next step to accessing services is to:

- Call the member services toll free phone number listed in your VBH-PA Member Handbook or on page 6 of this packet and speak with a member services representative (MSR).
- The MSR will ask you questions to find out what kind of services your child needs and assist you with the next steps in the process or transfer you to the appropriate department.
- If you have a current evaluation (less than 60 days old) that recommends/prescribes Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services (BHRS), the MSR will help you contact someone to schedule your child’s Inter-Agency Service Planning Team (ISPT) meeting.
- If you do not have a current evaluation, the MSR will give you names, addresses, and phone numbers of at least two providers who can complete an evaluation for your child.
- You will then need to call these providers directly to schedule your appointment.
- After the evaluation, the evaluator will send the written report to VBH-PA. If BHRS, commonly known as wraparound services or Residential Treatment Facility services are recommended, an Interagency Services Planning Team (ISPT) meeting will be scheduled.

The purpose of the ISPT meeting is to review the recommendations made by the psychologist or psychiatrist, discuss current behaviors/symptoms that the child is exhibiting and to identify and discuss treatment goals to be addressed through Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services (BHRS) and other services. This is also a time to discuss if there are any additional behavioral health services that would benefit the child and his/her family such as case management services, school based interventions, specialized outpatient care, family therapy, etc. The information presented at the ISPT meeting is then used by VBH-PA to determine whether BHRS are the most appropriate mental health services to address the child's symptoms/behavior.

The initial Inter-Agency Service Planning Team (ISPT) meeting includes, at a minimum, you (the parent), a county representative, and a VBH-PA Child, Adolescent and Family Services (CAFS) Coordinator. At the discretion of the parent(s), a child under the age of 14 may or may not attend the meeting. Children aged 14 and over need to be present at their ISPT meetings. In addition, you may invite additional people who could be helpful in discussing your child's behaviors, including family members, school personnel, Office of Children, Youth and Families, Juvenile Probation staff, Supports Coordinator, etc. The evaluator (Independent Prescriber) will be invited. You or any other team members may choose to participate in the meeting in person or by telephone.

The CAFS coordinator or county representative will lead the meeting and ask questions to gather information about your child to ensure that the services requested are the most appropriate for your child's symptoms. The CAFS coordinator will gather information and ask questions to make certain that medical necessity\* criteria are present for authorization of the requested services.

\* "Medical Necessity- Clinical determinations to establish a service or benefit which will, or is reasonably expected to:

- Prevent the onset of an illness, condition, or disability;
- Reduce or ameliorate the physical, mental, behavioral, or developmental effects of an illness, condition, injury, or disability;
- Assist the individual to achieve or maintain maximum functional capacity in performing daily activities, taking into account both the functional capacity of the individual and those functional capacities appropriate for individuals of the same age."

Necessary paperwork for the meeting includes your child's evaluation, the Plan of Care Summary, the ISPT Summary form, the Family Choice form, sign-in sheet, and Service Delivery schedule. This is referred to as the "packet".

You will be given a list of service providers and asked to choose a provider at your meeting.

\* Medical necessity criteria definition is quoted from "COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA HealthChoices of Behavioral Health Program Programs Standards and Requirements-Primary Contractor"  
January 1, 2008

Once they receive the final packet, the VBH-PA Child and Adolescent Family Services(CAFS) Coordinators have two business days to review your child's packet and determine if they are able to authorize the services as prescribed. The coordinators are only permitted to authorize services. If they are not able to substantiate the medical necessity for services, they will send the packet for peer review. Peer review is a process by which a VBH-PA psychiatrist or psychologist reviews your child's case with the person who wrote the evaluation recommending services to clarify questions about medical necessity.

If Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services (BHRS) are authorized, VBH-PA will contact the provider you have chosen and will ask them if they can provide your child with the services recommended. If the provider is unable to start providing the services within seven days, you will be informed of this and will be given the choice to either wait for the provider you have chosen or choose a different provider. If your child needs to receive other services, such as Outpatient Therapy or Case Management, VBH-PA will give you a choice of providers and can assist you in scheduling an appointment for your child.

If your child's recommended services are not authorized as prescribed, you have a right to accept the changes or to file a grievance. If VBH-PA does not completely approve a service for your child, they will tell you in a letter. How to file a grievance is explained in the letter. You may also refer to your VBH-PA member handbook. You can file a grievance if VBH-PA does any of the following:

- Denies a service
- Approves less service than what was requested
- Approves a different service from the one that was requested

If your Managed Care Organization is **Value Behavioral Health-PA (VBH-PA)**, these numbers will connect you to member services:

Armstrong	877-688-5969	Greene	877-688-5973
Beaver	877-688-5970	Indiana	877-688-5969
Butler	877-688-5971	Lawrence	877-688-5975
Cambria	866-404-4562	Mercer	866-404-4561
Crawford	866-404-4561	Venango	866-404-4561
Erie	866-404-4560	Washington	877-688-5976
Fayette	877-688-5972	Westmoreland	877-688-5977

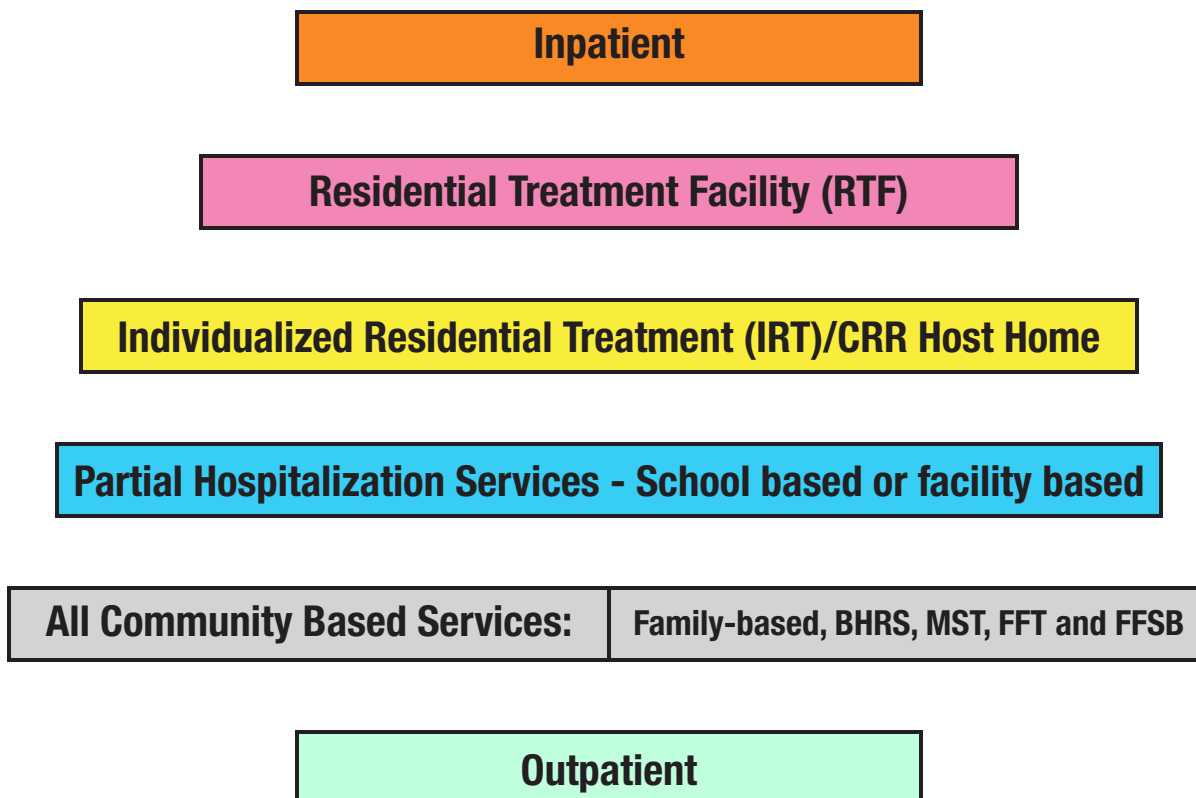
VBH-PA TTY number (for hearing impaired members) for all counties is 1-877-615-8502

If you are unsure who your child's Behavioral Health Managed Care Organization (MCO) is, call your County Assistance Office customer service center and ask them. You may also call the above VBH-PA member number for your county and ask them if you are a VBH-PA member.

You may also contact your county Mental Health/ Mental Retardation Base Service Unit to assist you:

Armstrong	724-543-2941	Greene	724-627-8156
Beaver	724-891-2827	Indiana	724-465-5576
Butler	724-431-0095	Lawrence	724-658-3578
Cambria	877-268-9463	Mercer	724-662-2230
Crawford	814-724-8380	Venago	814-432-9100
Erie	866-720-4825	Washington	724-225-6940
Fayette	724-430-1370		or 724-632-6801
			or 724-379-1420
		Westmoreland	724-837-1808
			or 800-353-6467

The flow chart below represents a Child and Adolescent Continuum of Care from Most to Least Restrictive from the Child and Family Perspective:



### Key to Flow Chart Acronyms

CRR - Community Residential Rehabilitation

BHRS - Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services, commonly known as Wraparound

MST - Multi-Systemic Therapy

FFT - Functional Family Therapy

FFSB - Family Focused Solutions Based

For more detailed information, please request the description of services available to HealthChoices Children and Adolescents using the Resource order form provided in this packet.

*The following tips may be helpful to you in navigating the children's behavioral health system successfully:*

**Keep a Notebook** where you record information about your efforts to get the services your son/daughter may need. Your notes should include:

- Name of the person you speak with and the agency they work for
- Telephone numbers
- The date and time you called
- What was discussed
- What each of you agreed to do as a result of the conversation
- Next steps for you

**Keep a File or Three Ring Binder** where you put any written documents that you get or send about your child's need for services and your efforts to obtain services. If you can organize it by the kinds of documents and the dates of documents, it may help you find information when you need it. This binder/file should include:

- Correspondence: letters, faxes, print-outs of emails that are sent to you by any providers, MCO representatives, State or County officials and copies of any letters, faxes, and emails you send
- Evaluations: your child's written evaluations and any other documents or supplements to the evaluation
- Treatment plans
- Progress notes

**Get and Keep the Fax confirmation page if you send a fax.** The confirmation fax states your document went through. Your fax machine may be able to print a log of the faxes sent.

**Do not send your original documents.** Keep the original documents for your records and send copies when information is requested.

**If possible, make your requests in writing.** If you make a request over the phone or in person, follow up with a written request either by email or letter.

**Be prepared.** Carefully read the evaluations, treatment plans and other documents about your child so you are familiar with the content and that they accurately reflect your child.

**Know the beginning and ending dates of your child's authorized services.** If you aren't sure, call your child's provider or the VBH toll-free member services number in your Member Handbook. (This phone number is also included in this packet).

**Know when your child's re-evaluation is due** (when the next psychological or psychiatric evaluation should be completed). Again, if you are unsure, contact your child's provider or the VBH-PA toll-free member services number in your Member Handbook (This phone number is also included in this packet).

**Maintain a calendar or daily planner** and write every doctor appointment, therapy session, evaluation, ISPT meeting, etc. Attending all appointments for your child is very important. Having a place with all of the appointment information is critical in being organized and available for helping your child obtain and keep necessary services.

Building a support team around your child is the first step!

Getting help when you need it is crucial in building strength and resiliency. Beyond caring and supportive family members and friends, parents often find it helpful to turn to:

**Support Groups-** Such community groups can assist people struggling with difficult issues. By sharing information, ideas, and emotions, group participants can assist one another and find comfort in knowing that they are not alone in experiencing difficulty.

**Books and Other publications-** by families who have successfully managed situations such as raising a child with autism or other behavioral health disorders. These stories can motivate readers to find a strategy that might work for them personally.

**Online Resources-** Information on the internet can be a helpful source of ideas, though the quality of information varies among sources. Be sure to use a reliable internet source—ones that are linked to reputable mental health organizations/associations are usually safe.

Advisory Board on Autism and Related Disorders (ABOARD) [www.aboard.org](http://www.aboard.org)

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

Attachment and Pediatric Bipolar Attachment Disorder (Reactive Attachment Disorder) [www.ATTACH.org](http://www.ATTACH.org)

Attention Deficit resources <http://www.addresources.org>

Autism Insurance Act [www.paautisminsurance.org](http://www.paautisminsurance.org)

Autism Link [www.autismlink.com](http://www.autismlink.com)

Autism Society of America (ASA) [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

Autism Speaks [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

Bureau of Autism Services (BAS) [www.autisminpa.org](http://www.autisminpa.org)

Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation (BPKids) [www.bpkids.org](http://www.bpkids.org)

Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders (CHADD) [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

Department of Public Welfare (DPW) [www.dpw.state.pa.us/](http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/)

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) [www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org)

Mental Health America [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/information/get-info/youth-and-families](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/information/get-info/youth-and-families)

Mental Health Association of Pennsylvania (MHAPA) [www.mhapa.org](http://www.mhapa.org)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder [www.ocfoundation.org](http://www.ocfoundation.org)

Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership Center (PEAL) [www.pealcenter.org](http://www.pealcenter.org)

Parent to Parent of Pennsylvania [www.parenttoparent.org](http://www.parenttoparent.org)

Pennsylvania Families Inc. (PA Families, Inc) [www.pafamiliesinc.com](http://www.pafamiliesinc.com)

Pennsylvania Health Law Project [www.phlp.org](http://www.phlp.org)

Pennsylvania Network of Care [www.pa.networkofcare.org](http://www.pa.networkofcare.org)

Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network (SWAN) [www.adoptpakids.org](http://www.adoptpakids.org)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [www.ptsdinfo.org](http://www.ptsdinfo.org)

Tourette's syndrome [www.tsa-usa.org](http://www.tsa-usa.org)

For further information to help you navigate Pennsylvania's Children's Mental Health system:

If you have internet access:

- Value Behavioral Health-PA website [www.vbh-pa.com](http://www.vbh-pa.com) under members (Parent tool kit)

Or if you prefer:

- CD that has all of the information listed below

Or you may request the following documents by completing this form (marking the boxes) and mailing it to the address listed at the bottom of this page:

- County Provider Directory ( specify county \_\_\_\_\_ )
- Value Behavioral Health Member Handbook ( specify county \_\_\_\_\_ )
- How Do I Get Help with a HealthChoices Complaint (brochure)
- How Do I Get Help with a HealthChoices Grievance (brochure)
- ACT 62 Frequently Asked Questions
- Visit with a Psychiatrist (pamphlet)
- What is a Functional Behavioral Assessment Frequently Asked Questions
- Helping Children and Youth with Serious MH Needs: Systems of Care (hard copy only)
- Pennsylvania's Children and Adolescent Service System Program Core Principles (CASSP Principles)
- Description of Services available to HealthChoices Children and Adolescents (handout)
- What if My Child's Services Are Not Authorized? (tip sheet)
- What's Your Opinion Of HealthChoices Services (brochure)
- VBH-PA' s Family Advisory Committee Brochure
- VBH-PA' s Recovery and Resiliency Specialist Brochure
- Treatment of Children with Mental Illness (NIMH Frequently Asked Questions)
- Getting An Accurate Diagnosis for Your Child: 10 Steps for Families (NAMI handout)
- Other: (please be specific with your request) \_\_\_\_\_

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Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

County: \_\_\_\_\_

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Mail your request to: Value Behavioral Health of PA      Attention: Prevention, Education, and Outreach Department  
520 Pleasant Valley Road  
Trafford, PA 15085

If you have questions, please contact VBH-PA by dialing your county's toll-free number found in this guide and ask to speak to someone in the PE&O Department.