

## How to prepare for your child's first CAMHS appointment

If your child suffers with their mental health, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is likely to be an important resource on the journey towards their recovery.

### Knowing what to expect

Although they are there to help, the CAMHS team may not always have all the answers, which can feel frustrating, so being acquainted with what to expect from your first CAMHS appointment will make things easier.

### Things to do before your first CAMHS appointment

- It will be a big help if you keep a journal or write down beforehand everything that you want the CAMHS team to know, such as your child's mental health history, the things that trigger their distress, things that help to calm them, as well as any questions that you'd like to ask them.
- Think about things you need to take to the appointment. It's likely that you will have to wait a while so having something to occupy you both will make the wait less stressful. Having a drink and a favourite snack always helps.
- Your child will probably be feeling anxious beforehand, so think about what might help to pass the time as peacefully as possible on the journey. It might be listening to their own music or something on the radio, but whatever it is, try to avoid burdening them with extra information or things that are on your mind.
- Think about and, if necessary, plan somewhere where to go on the way back like a favourite fast-food place, as this will help to diffuse any tension that you might both have been feeling, as well as feeling like a reward for the difficult steps taken.

### What to do after your first CAMHS appointment

As much as you might want to know afterwards how it went or what was said, your child will need time to decompress and to process any information given to them. A lot of parents find it best just to ask if they're okay and not ask questions. Rest assured; if there's anything significant, CAMHS will tell you about it.

### Some things to do and know as you look ahead

- Try and update CAMHS about progress or struggles in a private phone conversation between appointments.
- If you can, summarize and confirm things in an email. This will help to make the appointments shorter and more effective.
- CAMHS professionals may sometimes tell you that they can't discuss things for confidentiality reasons, but that doesn't mean you can't ask them about what the plans are going forward, and you're also entitled to discuss your own concerns and ask them for any advice.

### Some additional resources that may help.

- NHS advice for supporting the mental wellbeing of others. Better Health: Every Mind matters <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/>
- For information on how to access NHS Mental health services visit <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/>