

NAPNAP Position Statement on the Integration of Mental Health Care in Pediatric Primary Care Settings

The National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) acknowledges the importance of providing children and adolescents with comprehensive mental health services including anticipatory guidance, prevention strategies, standardized screening, early and evidence-based intervention, and timely follow-up. One out of every four to five children has a mental/behavioral health disorder that constitutes a major public health concern (Merikangas et al., 2010). The incidence of mental/behavioral health disorders is thought to be grossly underestimated because of a lack of appropriate screening, identification, and referral by primary care providers (PCPs). In addition, there is a substantial stigma associated with having a mental health/behavioral diagnosis, which often results in denial by families and a reluctance to talk with PCPs about mental health/behavioral concerns (Melnik et al., 2012). Early detection of and evidence-based intervention for mental health and behavioral

problems is critical to prevent serious ongoing adverse outcomes (Stein, Zitner, & Jensen, 2006).

Research suggests that standardized screening procedures substantially increase the number of children and adolescents identified with mental/behavioral health problems (Brown & Wissow, 2010). Most pediatric primary care settings provide some developmental screening; unfortunately, standardized screening tools are often not used, there is little knowledge of available resources for early intervention, and very few providers are equipped to provide mental/behavioral counseling (Melnik et al., 2012). Pediatric primary care practice provides the optimal setting to promote the physical, developmental, and mental well-being of children and adolescents. Likewise, primary care providers play a key role in the identification of mental/behavioral health disorders and are instrumental in accessing appropriate early intervention and other resources (Knapp & Foy, 2012). The growing demand for mental health services for children and adolescents could be ameliorated by pediatric PCPs with expertise in child development, behavior management, and treatment of mental health disorders (Campo et al., 2005). Pediatric nurse practitioners (PNPs) can further validate competency and expertise in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of children and adolescents with mental health disorders by obtaining national specialty certification (Pediatric Nursing Certification Board, 2013).

To provide comprehensive mental and/or behavioral health services to all children and adolescents, NAPNAP asserts that PNPs should:

1. Use a lifespan approach to provide mental and behavioral health promotion and standardized screening from the beginning of life, through adolescence, and into adulthood.
2. Ascribe to the notion that optimal physical and mental health in childhood and adolescence lays

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All regular position statements from the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners automatically expire 5 years after publication unless reaffirmed, revised or retired at or before that time.

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the foundation for physical and mental well-being in adulthood.

3. Integrate anticipatory guidance, prevention strategies, standardized screening (including mothers for postpartum depression), and early identification of mental and behavioral health problems into routine primary pediatric health care (Gagliardi & Honigfeld, 2008; Olson, Dietrich, Prazar, & Hurley, 2006).
4. Educate children, adolescents, and families about early signs and symptoms of mental and behavioral health disorders and provide strategies to promote health.
5. Implement evidence-based interventions for common mental and behavioral health problems in primary care.
6. Consider additional education and training to obtain specialty certification in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of children and adolescents with mental health disorders in order to provide comprehensive mental/behavioral care in a primary care setting.
7. Advocate for reimbursement policies that support parity for mental health services provided to children in primary care settings.
8. Refer children and adolescents with complex mental/behavioral health problems to competent mental health specialists who provide developmentally appropriate, evidence-based, and culturally competent care (NAPNAP, 2011).
9. Strengthen PNP programs by adding didactic and clinical experiences in mental health assessment and promotion; early and evidence-based interventions; and the diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders in children and adolescents.
10. Support legislative and other interdisciplinary efforts that aim to bolster children's mental/behavioral health needs at the local, state, and federal levels.

In summary, NAPNAP, an organization that promotes optimal health for children through leadership, practice, advocacy, education and research, acknowledges the importance of providing comprehensive mental and behavioral health services to all children and adolescents. Furthermore, NAPNAP acknowledges the unique contribution that PNPs in the primary care setting can make in the prevention, standardized

screening, early intervention, assessment, diagnosis, counseling, and treatment for children and adolescents in need of mental health services.

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