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Early intervention in mental illness

Key messages

- Early intervention can have significant positive impact on a person's prognosis.
 - Early intervention is particularly important in affecting outcomes for children and young people.
 - General practitioners are a good place to start for early intervention.
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Prompt diagnosis and early intervention in the initial stages of a mental illness can have significant and life-changing consequences for a person's mental health.

Early intervention can lead to:

- improved diagnosis and treatment
- more timely and targeted referrals to specialist services
- improved confidence and engagement of primary care providers.

What is early intervention?

Early intervention is the process of providing specialist intervention and support to a person who is experiencing or demonstrating any of the early symptoms of mental illness.

Intervention is not only critical for preventing or reducing the progress of a mental illness, but for improving a person's mental and physical health, community participation and socioeconomic outcomes far into the future.

Early intervention in children and young people

Early intervention is particularly important for children and young people, for whom mental illness can have profound, long-term consequences.

With children, early intervention can include the identification of infants or children with a higher risk of developing mental illness or severe behavioural and developmental disturbances.

For adolescents, mental illness is a significant risk factor for not completing school and subsequent study, and for longer-term mental and physical health outcomes – as well as impacting on their families, friends and others around them.

GPs and early intervention

A general practitioner (GP) is a good place for families to start if there are concerns about a child's development or behaviour. GPs can perform an initial assessment of the child and, if necessary, arrange referrals to a psychiatrist or another specialist for assessment of the need for intervention or treatment.

Some children, for example those with autism spectrum disorders, can be at greater risk of secondary mental health problems developing later in life, and may need to be seen by a paediatrician, psychologist or other professional to optimise their future mental health.

Resources to support early intervention

The national depression initiative, [beyondblue](#), offers a range of publications and other resources to help GPs and other health professionals address issues relating to depression, anxiety and other mental disorders with patients and their families.

These resources include guidelines for helping GPs broach sensitive topics with their patients, in order to support them towards diagnosis and early intervention.

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