

Basic strategies to establish a therapeutic relationship in a primary care setting

David J. Schonfeld, MD, FAAP

Pediatrician-in-Chief,
St. Christopher's Hospital for Children
Chair, Department of Pediatrics,
Drexel University College of Medicine



No disclosures

- I have no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturers(s) of any commercial products(s) and/or provider of commercial services discussed in this CME activity.
- I do not intend to discuss an unapproved/investigative use of a commercial product/device in my presentation.



Pediatricians are de facto mental health providers for children

- Children most likely receive treatment from primary care physicians for mental disorders
- Most psychotropic drugs prescribed by primary care physicians
- Psychosocial problems most common chronic condition for pediatric visits



Creating an environment where it is safe for children/youth to share

- Greet child first
- Offer to meet alone with child – conducting interview alone vs. both child and parent present
- Establish ground rules for confidentiality
- Encourage parent-child communication
- Limit private conversations with parents
- Maintain focus on child



Asking questions

- Use open ended questions – not just casual conversation; even young children can contribute information about their health
- Speak in such a way that the child can understand
- Ask necessary questions
- Explain why you are asking a question that may seem intrusive or irrelevant



Obtaining history

- Ask about peers; normalize reactions
- Use of projective techniques – don't over-interpret or be too concrete in interpretation
- Take history in non-judgmental manner
- Do convey well accepted social norms and voice medical opinion
- Remain sensitive to underlying issues/agendas; often the best response to a question is another question or a comment



Dealing with resistance

- When individuals are resistant or uncomfortable -- verbalize concerns; don't force children to tell you something when they aren't ready
- When you meet resistance, explore reason
- You can't take care of all mental health and behavioral health concerns in one session – don't try. Validate the concern, offer additional evaluation, schedule follow-up
- Principle of consultation: don't solve a difficult long-standing problem easily, *even if you think you can*



Appreciate the limitations of your role as a pediatrician

- Limitations of role: to advise, support, counsel, and treat. Parents often will not take advice, at least not right away
- Maintain boundaries
 - Limit sharing of personal information
 - Don't just give advice on parenting based on how you were raised or how you raised your children



Core communication skills for doctor-patient interactions (Coleman)

Active listening	Confrontation
Reflection	Interpretation (Reframing)
Elaboration	Silence
Clarification	Tracking
Empathy – understand with emotion	Summarizing

