

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists: Experts in Children's Mental Health



Who is a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist?

Child and adolescent psychiatrists (CAP) are medical physicians (MD or DO) uniquely trained to identify and treat complex relationships between physical illness and mental and behavioral health disorders over the lifespan of a patient and across diverse care delivery settings. CAPs are the leading pediatric mental health experts, especially in the clinical, evidence-based use of psychiatric medication within this population.

CAPs are trained to evaluate and manage a wide range of mental health conditions—ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, substance use disorders, mood and anxiety disorders, trauma-related issues, severe behavioral disturbances, and severe mental illness (SMI)-related conditions including thought disorders like schizophrenia—always with a developmental lens.

They often work closely with a team of healthcare providers that may include pediatricians, psychotherapists, care coordinators, and other partners in the system of care, as well as parents/caregivers in a supportive and accessible environment.

How to Become a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist?

After completing medical school, CAPs undergo a general psychiatry residency (typically four years), followed by an additional two years of specialized child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship training focused on child and adolescent development, psychopathology, and treatment.

After training, child and adolescent psychiatrists take a nationally certified adult psychiatry board certification exam and many take an additional nationally certified child and adolescent psychiatry certification exam. Both exams are from the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

Between medical school, residency, and fellowship, it takes over 9 years of training and supervised patient care to become fully trained in the medical and behavioral aspects of child and adolescent psychiatry.

Where Do Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists Work?

Child and adolescent psychiatrists practice in a wide range of settings including private practice, group practice, hospitals, academic research institutions, community-based healthcare settings, and via telemedicine. They may also specialize in certain patient populations like infants or transitional-aged youth or in certain areas of work including psychotherapy, forensic work, psychopharmacology, and research.

They work across various settings including inpatient psychiatric units, emergency departments, outpatient clinics, residential treatment centers, schools, and increasingly through telehealth platforms, adapting care to each child's environment and needs.

Most of them engage in multiple areas of employment, which may include school consultations, community mental health-based centers, hospital systems, courts, and foster care systems.

Career paths for CAPs are diverse and may include clinical work, research, teaching, advocacy, public health, or leadership in shaping mental health policy and systems of care.

How Many Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists Are There?

There are over 11,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists in the U.S., approximately fourteen child and adolescent psychiatrist for every 100,000 children.

Learn More about Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

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