

Prepping for Your Appointment with Your General Practitioner

First and foremost: Yes, bring your child to this appointment.

There are a few things you should do before you head to your GP to talk about your child and their mental health. Here are a few suggestions you may not have thought to do:

- 1. Prepare your child.** Be sure that you've communicated with your child the purpose of the appointment. Ask them to be as open and honest with their doctor as possible. Voice your concerns to your child and let them know you're there to support them and help them in any ways possible.
- 2. Write down your concerns. All of them.** Oftentimes when we get into appointments we forget to mention a few things that are important. Write down everything you would like to discuss, every situation you feel is important for the doctor to know. Star the most important items (time is often limited) but help ensure you get your top concerns heard.
- 3. Emotions happen.** Just a quick heads up that you may get emotional at this appointment and your emotions are valid and should be shared. The worry you have for your child is real, you do not need to put on a brave face all the time. Allow yourself to feel your emotions but try to keep the conversation on your child and their mental health.
- 4. Make an appointment for yourself.** You may want to consider scheduling an appointment with your GP for yourself after the appointment you go to with your child. Supporting your child when you have concerns about their mental health and perhaps managing a child diagnosed with a mental illness almost always requires the parent to get counselling themselves. Those who support their child the way you may need to are called Support Warriors - and Support Warriors - you need support yourself. So get yourself in to see your GP to get a referral for your own psychiatrist, psychologist or counsellor.
- 5. Plan to do something fun after your appointment.** For some, these initial appointments can be quite emotional so it's important to have something fun to do after your appointment. Plan to go for ice cream, out to lunch, go to a movie or plan for a special movie couch snuggle. Whatever brings joy and lightness to you and your child, it's important to spend time with them after these initial appointments.

- 6. Breathe.** You're doing everything right at this point. You're successfully helping your child move through the system and you're advocating for a joyful and healthy life right now. This can be exhausting, so take a breath and keep moving forward. You may start feeling overwhelmed but at this point it is one foot in front of the other. Move step to step and try not to look too far ahead into the "what if's" and "what happens when". Breathe. Be in this moment and this moment alone.