Sometimes our mental health can cause challenges

Our mental health affects our relationships with family & friends & our involvement at school or at work. When we are experiencing mental health issues, or mental illness, this can create challenges in these areas of life. For instance, we may find or people around you may notice changes in your behaviour, such as becoming withdrawn, arguing, yelling & crying. We may feel our emotions are on a roller coaster, all mixed up – angry, sad, worried or scared. Small things may upset us. Sometimes we may feel odd, strange things maybe happening around you, you might start hearing sounds or seeing things. Our behaviour may change & we might start using alcohol or other drugs to cope with what is happening.

Why should I have an Assessment?

People may be worried about the changes in you. After talking with you, your parents or caregivers, doctor, school counsellors or social workers may suggest you have a Mental Health Assessment - or you may ask for one yourself. An assessment will help make sense of what is happening to you. It will help you work understand whether you may be stressed because of something happening at home, relationship problems, bullying, or exposure to violence or abuse. It can also help start a conversation about the kinds of support that are available which might help you with what’s going on.

Having a Mental Health Assessment is something lots of people do. One in five people have mental health problems some time in their lives & recovery is very possible especially when people learn about mental health, receive support & have hope for the future. Recovery is defined as living well in the presence or absence of illness.
What is a Mental Health Service?

A Mental Health Assessment is usually done at a Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (sometimes called CAMHS), which is a free service. A range of different mental health professionals (clinicians) may work at the service, because different people may need different kinds of help & support to feel better.

What happens during an Assessment?

An Appointment can usually be made for an urgent assessment within days. Otherwise, it could be several weeks to wait for an initial assessment.

You & your parents/caregivers will meet with a clinician. They may meet with you together or separately. It can be easier sometimes to be seen without your parents/caregiver there so it is important that you mention it. Cultural support is available to you & your family/caregivers. If English is not your first language, an interpreter can be organised.

There is usually a lot of talking done during an Assessment. The staff will ask questions about the concerns you & your family have. They will try to make sense of what has been happening in your life, at school, work & home. Sometimes they may ask about your childhood & what it was like growing up.

The staff will give a summary to you & your family/whānau about what they think is going on & ideas about what may help. Sometimes, it takes a few meetings to gather all the information that is needed to completely understand everything that’s going on.

What happens after the Assessment?

Different things can happen after the assessment, depending on what is right for you & your family.

You may not need to go back after the Assessment. Talking about the concerns may have given everyone ideas about how to deal with the problems. You & your family/whānau may be able to manage with some help from other family members, friends or school staff.

Counselling at a different community agency may be recommended. These agencies may provide help with individual or family counselling, trauma counselling or help with alcohol or drug problems.

You may be offered ongoing help at the Mental Health Service, for problems such as depression, anxiety, or psychosis. A range of treatments are available including therapy & counselling, learning problem-solving skills & medications. Treatment options that are right for your situation will be discussed with you.
What are the rights of young people & families?

All people should receive a copy of the Health & Disability Commission Service User Code of Rights brochure with information about your rights while receiving services including:

- Respect
- Confidentiality
- Information about your diagnosis & treatment including any side effects of medication
- Your right to decide, say no or change your mind at any time
- Support from people who you want involved
- Making a complaint.

If you are not happy about how you have been treated or feel you are not being heard, then it is important to contact the manager of the service & inform them of your experience. Alternatively, you may get in touch with the complaints person at your DHB, or contact an advocate from a mental health advocacy service or the Health & Disability Commission Advocates Team http://advocacy.hdc.org.nz/

If you make a complaint in writing or by telling someone at the service you have a complaint, they are required to follow this up & get in touch with you with the outcome e.g. what they’re going to do to make things right, or what changes they’re going to make for the future. No one is allowed to treat you differently because you have made a complaint, so you don’t need to worry about the staff’s reaction.