Common Elements Approaches: Brief Interventions for Common Pediatric Primary Care Problems

“Common elements” approaches can be used as brief interventions. They differ from common-factors in that instead of applying to a range of diagnoses that are not causally related, common-elements are semi-specific components of psychosocial therapies that apply to a group of related conditions.¹⁻⁴ In this approach, the clinician caring for a patient who manifests a cluster of causally related symptoms—for example, fearfulness and avoidant behaviors—draws interventions from evidence-based psychosocial therapies for a related set of disorders—in this example, anxiety disorders. Thus, as a first-line intervention to help an anxious child, the pediatric clinician coaches the parent to provide gradual exposure to feared activities or objects and to model brave behavior—common elements in a number of effective psychosocial treatments for anxiety disorders. Such interventions can be definitive or a means to reduce distress and ameliorate symptoms while a child is awaiting mental health specialty assessment and/or care.

The following table is used to summarize promising common-elements approaches applicable to common pediatric primary care problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presenting Problem Area</th>
<th>Most Common Elements of Related Evidence-Based Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Graded exposure, modeling</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADHD and oppositional problems</td>
<td>Tangible rewards, praise for child and parent, help with monitoring, time-out, effective commands and limit setting, response cost</td>
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<td>Low mood</td>
<td>Cognitive and/or coping methods, problem-solving strategies, activity scheduling, behavioral rehearsal, social skills building</td>
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References


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