



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.

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

Adapted from Wissow LS, van Ginneken N, Chandna J, Rahman A. Integrating children’s mental health into primary care. *Pediatr Clin North Am*. 2016; 63(1):103.

References

1. Chorpita BF, Daleiden EL, Weisz JR. Identifying and selecting the common elements of evidence based interventions: a distillation and matching model. *Ment Health Serv Res*. 2005;7(1):5–20
2. Chorpita BF, Daleiden EL, Park AL, et al. Child STEPs in California: a cluster randomized effectiveness trial comparing modular treatment with community implemented treatment for youth with anxiety, depression, conduct problems, or traumatic stress. *J Consult Clin Psychol*. 2017;85(1):13–25
3. Tynan WD, Baum R. *Adapting Psychosocial Interventions to Primary Care. Mental Health Care of Children and Adolescents: A Guide for Primary Care Clinicians*. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2018
4. Kemper KJ, Vora S, Walls R; Task Force on Complementary and Alternative Medicine; Provisional Section on Complementary, Holistic, and Integrative Medicine. American Academy of Pediatrics. The use of complementary and alternative medicine in pediatrics. *Pediatrics*. 2008;122(6):1374–1386. Reaffirmed January 2013

Adapted from Foy JM, Green CM, Earls, MF; American Academy Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Mental Health Leadership Work Group. Mental Health Competencies for Pediatric Practice. *Pediatrics*. 2019;144(5): e20192757; <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/144/5/e20192757>

The recommendations in this publication do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or serve as a standard of medical care. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate. Original resource included as part of *Addressing Mental Health Concerns in Pediatrics: A Practical Resource Toolkit for Clinicians*, 2nd Edition. Inclusion in this resource does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this resource. Website addresses are as current as possible but may change at any time.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not review or endorse any modifications made to this resource and in no event shall the AAP be liable for any such changes.

© 2021 American Academy of Pediatrics. All rights reserved.

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

