

# Breaking down mental health barriers in children

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Parents face many barriers in seeking help for their child's mental health problems, according to new research led by experts in psychiatry at The University of Nottingham.

The study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* found that [parents](#) are often deterred from asking for professional help for their child because of embarrassment, stigma and the fear of their child being 'labeled'.

Other common barriers to treatment include difficulty in getting GP appointments and parents' reticence in raising their concerns about their child during a short appointment. The research also revealed that parents can hold back from seeking help because they are worried about receiving a diagnosis, or being judged a poor parent or even that their child may be taken away from them.

The study was led by researchers in the University's Division of

Psychiatry with collaborators at King's College London. The team held focus groups with 34 parents who had concerns about their child's [mental health](#). Most of the [children](#) had clinically significant mental health symptoms or associated impairment in function.

The research also found that appointment systems caused problems for some parents – they had difficulty getting an appointment, and felt standard consultations were too short for the GP to observe their children's behavior or for them to raise their concerns fully. Other parents saw GPs' surgeries as being 'medical places' and so did not feel it was necessary to raise their children's emotional and behavioral problems with their GP.

The researchers found that parents were more likely to seek help if they had built a good relationship with their GP and saw the same doctor regularly. They were also more likely to raise concerns if their GP showed interest in their family life and gave them time to talk about emotional issues.

Lead researcher, Dr. Kapil Sayal said: "Not recognizing children's mental health difficulties can mean their problems persist into adulthood. Our study shows that parents value GPs showing interest in their family situations, and listening to and taking their concerns seriously.

"This means that most GPs should be able to help parents who have concerns about their child's mental health. This could be achieved through GPs taking a family-oriented approach to consultations as well as putting more emphasis on children's mental health in postgraduate GP training. Allowing parents to pre-book longer appointments may also be helpful."

Provided by University of Nottingham

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