

# Mental health problems mistaken for physical illness in children

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Many children are admitted to general acute wards with mental health problems mistaken for physical disease.

Somatic symptoms, such as [abdominal pain](#), headaches, limb pain and tiredness, often mask underlying problems and result in the NHS spending money on investigations to eliminate wrongly diagnosed disease.

A literature review published in Nursing Children and Young People examines how children's nurses can recognise such complaints and help to address them.

It identified that somatic complaints are linked to children's upbringing and their home environments, including unstable home lives, a chaotic upbringing and parental over-protectiveness.

The authors suggest that nurses working on the wards are in an ideal position to identify cases of children and [young people](#) presenting with [somatic symptoms](#) and provide holistic care.

They say that nurse training and practice need to be adapted to enable somatic complaints to be diagnosed quickly and ensure correct management from the start.

The article concludes that somatic disorders can, to some extent, be predicted when nurses take into consideration issues such as poor family

situations and parental influences, psychosocial stress, and poor emotional functioning.

Nurses should assess these factors together with physical symptoms to provide a full picture of a child's circumstances and healthcare needs.

**More information:** *Children and Young People*. 26, 1, 16-20. [DOI: 10.7748/ncyp2014.02.26.1.16.e368](https://doi.org/10.7748/ncyp2014.02.26.1.16.e368)

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