



## When to Request a Psychiatric Evaluation

*by John T. Brentar, Ph.D.*

At Morrissey-Compton, we are often asked when it is the right time to consider prescribing medication to treat a student's symptoms.

If the student is in treatment with a mental health professional, parents should discuss the possibility of trying medication with his or her therapist to determine whether it would be an appropriate step in the student's treatment plan. If the student is not seeing a therapist, but is displaying emotional or behavioral difficulties that are not responding to help provided by his or her pediatrician, parents, school staff, and other community supports, consider a mental health evaluation as the first step in developing a treatment plan. The evaluator can help parents decide the next course of action, such as individual therapy, family therapy, group therapy, and/or a medication evaluation.

### Not a Singular Solution

Medication can be an effective part of the treatment for a number of mental health conditions during childhood and adolescence, such as anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, ADHD, eating disorders, psychosis, bipolar disorder, severe aggression, autism, or sleep problems. However, psychiatric medications are rarely used alone and are usually one part of a comprehensive treatment plan. Indeed, there is considerable research that indicates that combined treatment (therapy and medication) is more effective in the treatment of anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder than either approach alone. For ADHD, medication has proven to be the most effective and fastest-acting treatment of attention problems, but therapy can be extremely helpful in addressing self-esteem concerns, social difficulties, and managing stress. Similarly, educational therapy can help improve academic performance.



### What to Watch For

Some warning signs that may trigger a mental health or medication evaluation, particularly if they are observed across a variety of settings including home and school, are:

- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Social withdrawal or withdrawal from normal recreational activities
- Symptoms of sadness/tearfulness

- Excessive fears or worries
- Repeated thoughts of death

### How it Helps

When medication is prescribed appropriately by a child and adolescent psychiatrist, and is taken as prescribed, it can help reduce or eliminate physiologically-based obstacles to change, enabling the student's own efforts to be more effective and improve his or her daily functioning. For example, it can also help the student use other support services more effectively, such as therapy (due to improved motivation and engagement associated with lower levels of symptoms), tutoring (due to improved focus/attention), and social support (due to improved social motivation).

### Look No Further

We are very pleased that Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist **Dr. Thomas Butler** has joined Morrissey-Compton to provide psychiatric consultations to families. This allows our students to access medication services along with our other support services such as individual, family, and group therapy; educational therapy; and executive function therapy. Not only does this provide a convenient one-stop center for student support services, but it also allows for close collaboration of the student's treatment team. However, Dr. Butler's services are available to all students regardless of where they may receive other services, and he is happy to collaborate with other treatment providers.