I'm Going to See a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist: Now What?

Why am I freaking out? I'm not sure if I want to do this. How will talking about things even help?

How long am I going to be here? What am I supposed to say? What if I don't have enough stuff to say? What if I say something wrong?

I wonder what this doctor is going to look like? Will she understand where I'm coming from? What if I don't like talking to her?

I really hope I don't see anyone I know here. What's going to happen when I'm in her office? I wonder if I'll have to lie down on a big couch. That would be SO awkward. Is she just going to keep asking 'how do you feel' over and over? I'm not sure if I feel like talking. It might just make things worse.

It's going to be so weird to open up to a total stranger. If I tell her I've had bad thoughts, will I get locked up in a mental hospital? Can I get in trouble if I did something I shouldn't have done?

What if she thinks I'm a freak? Or talks to her friends and family about me? What if she thinks I'm doing it for attention? My life isn't that bad so what if she tells me I just need to get over it? Will she even believe me...

Will my mom be in the whole session with me? I can't say anything around her. The doctor might just tell my mom everything after the appointment anyway.

Ugh and will I have to take medicine? I don't want to feel like a zombie. Or worse... what if I get addicted?

Is this doctor just seeing me because my mom is paying her to talk to me? Will she actually care?
Hey, are you okay?

I'm freaking out. This is my first time here.

It's okay, I was nervous at my first visit too. What are you worried about?

Is the doctor nice? What if I don't like her? What am I supposed to even talk about? DO I HAVE TO LIE ON A COUCH?!!

Haha, No you don't have to lie on a couch. I'm not sure which doctor you're seeing but all of the doctors here are nice and cool. They get it. You just talk.

Talk about what?

You can talk about whatever. She'll ask you questions too so that will help if you don't know what to say.

How will talking change the fact that my life sucks?

I can't explain it, but letting it out helps. It helped me to see things differently.

Uhh... I don't know.

At first I thought my doctor was going to freak out when I told her stuff. But I was able to be honest and she really helped me.

Is she just going to tell my parents everything I say?

No, not really. You guys will talk more about what she can and can't share when you get in there.

I don't know. I'm not even sure I need to be here.

Getting help is one of the bravest things you can do. It takes a lot of courage. If nobody knows what's going on, nobody can help you.

I guess that makes sense.

Just remember, it's okay. Lots of us go through hard times. I finally decided I wasn't going to lie anymore or act like everything's fine when it isn't. With my doctor's help, I finally feel like myself again. I hope you'll feel the same way too.

Hey, thanks.

No problem! Just don't overthink it. You've got this!

Okay.
Hi, Matt and Mrs. Smith. My name is Dr. Cap. I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist. It's nice to meet you both. Matt, would you and your mom like to come back to my office now?

Um, Sure.

Please sit wherever you like and I'll explain what will happen today.

Matt you and I will spend the majority of the hour together talking about what brought you in today. Then I'll spend a few minutes with your Mom to see if she has any concerns. At the end, we'll all come back together to discuss next steps. Do you have any questions about anything I just said?

I don't think so.

No, not at the moment.

Okay, but if any questions come up, please feel free to stop me to ask.

Okay.

Okay Mrs. Smith if you can return to the waiting room, I'll come and get you when it is time for us to talk.

Before I start asking you questions, do you have any questions for me?

So what exactly are you allowed to tell my mom?

What about like... drinking and stuff?

That depends. If you engage in life-threatening activities while drinking or using drugs, that is something I'd want your Mom to know. If you used a long time ago, but it's not causing problems right now, that's not something I've have to tell. Does that make sense?

Yeah, okay.

Okay, well can you tell me more about yourself?

Um, well I'm 15 and I'm a sophomore at Northeast High School. I live with my mom and my little sister. I play soccer.

Oh cool, what position do you play?

I'm a midfielder.

That's great. I played defense when I was in college.

Really?

Yes, I love soccer too. I still play whenever I can and I love watching the world cup.
I love watching the US team play. One of my dreams is to actually go to the championship game someday. That would be so awesome!

I agree. I’m glad to be around another soccer enthusiast.

So you’re in 10th grade, you like soccer, and you live with your mom and sister. That’s a good start. Can you tell me about what brought you here to see me today?

Well this was more of my mom’s idea but I don’t know... I haven’t been feeling like myself lately. I’ve been feeling... weird. Like everything is ten times harder than it should be.

That sound like it must be tough for you.

Yeah it is. Even with soccer... Sometimes I come up with excuses so I don’t have to go. When I do go, it takes all the energy I have to make it through practice or a game.

Some time later...

I just notice everything and get so annoyed. I don’t mean to yell at my mom or sister, but I just get so annoyed with some of the things they do and say to me. I feel bad after I yell, but I can’t stop it in the moment...

Matt, thank you for sharing what’s been going on with you. I really appreciate your courage and honesty. Sounds like you have been having a tough time. I’m really hopeful that you will start to feel better as we work together.

I guess the main reason my mom brought me here today is because I haven’t really been easy to get along with lately.

Yeah me too.

How so?

Now I’d like to invite your Mom back in to talk with her. Sometimes it’s helpful so she doesn’t have a million questions for you when you guys get in the car to drive home.

Yeah, it would be great if she didn’t interrogate me in the car, she likes to do that.

Well, I can’t make any promises, but this should help. After I talk to her, we’ll all meet together to discuss my recommendations for treatment. Does that sound okay?

Yeah it does, thanks.

That wasn’t so bad.
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These comics were created in 2017-2018 through a collaboration between child and adolescent psychiatrists on AACAP's Community-Based Systems of Care Committee and AACAP’s Youth Connection (AYC), a group of youth with lived mental health experience. They are available to be printed out and placed in your waiting room so that young patients can read them as they wait for their appointment.

The comics are a hypothetical depiction of a first visit to a child and adolescent psychiatrist and represent just some of things a young patient may experience. The intent of the comics is not only to educate, but to let children and adolescents know that there is nothing wrong with seeing a psychiatrist or getting help.

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Visit www.aacap.org for additional resources.