

## Getting Help from Professionals

Each child and his/her symptoms are unique. Always work with your child's health care providers to personalize a treatment plan.

➤ *Seek help from professionals if your child:*

- misses a lot of school or other activities.
- shows big mood changes because of his/her symptoms.
- worries too much about symptoms or health (or worries a lot, in general).
- has symptoms that continue without a cause your child's doctor can identify.
- shows signs or symptoms that worry you about your child's safety.



➤ *Who to see for help:*

- Your child's pediatrician
  - ❖ to consider medications to help
  - ❖ to identify and refer to other providers who may help (such as Physical or Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, etc.)
  - ❖ to coordinate treatment
- A behavioral health provider (like a Pediatric Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Clinical Social Worker, or Professional Counselor):
  - ❖ to help manage symptoms while continuing everyday activities
  - ❖ NOTE: For proven effective treatment, your provider should be trained in and use Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to treat your child's condition.

## Your Child's Hospital Care

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Admission and Discharge Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for Admission: \_\_\_\_\_

Diagnosis: \_\_\_\_\_

Providers who worked with your child: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Treatment Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Outpatient Follow-up Plans: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Who to call with questions or emergencies: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## When your Child or Adolescent has Physical Symptoms without Straightforward Causes

### Information for Parents And Caregivers





## What is it called, anyway?

Somatic Symptom Disorders (SSDs) are any physical symptoms for which doctors are not able to find a disease or problem with the body that explains them. Physiological causes such as a broken bone or an infection are only one of several things that can cause physical problems, make them worse, or keep them from getting better.

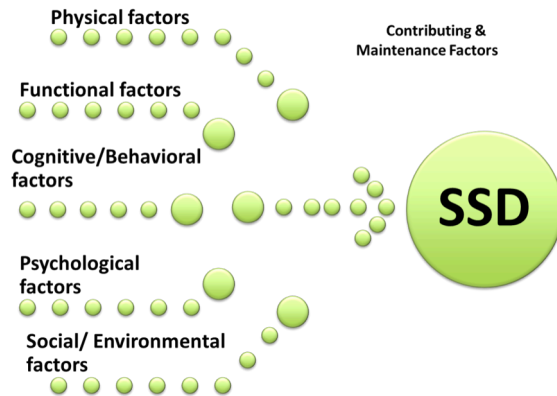


Figure courtesy of Caplin, Primary Children's Hospital, 2015

If doctors cannot find a disease or problem causing your child's symptoms, that does not mean they are not real or are "all in your child's head." Other things may be affecting the symptoms and should be evaluated so appropriate treatment can improve symptoms or help your child live his/her life better even if the symptoms do not go away.

## Helping Your Child/Teen Minimize Symptoms and Return to Normal Activities

Some things you and your child can do to reduce symptoms and how much they get in the way of normal activities include:

### *Encouraging Healthy Behavior*

- Focus on functioning over symptoms
  - Maintain normal schedules and routines (school, chores, etc.) as much as possible
  - Set daily goals to increase functioning
  - Praise progress - "Great job completing your physical therapy exercises today!"
- Give extra attention and affection when your child is coping well with symptoms.
- Ensure good nutrition and sleep for your child

### *Minimizing Impact of Symptoms*

- Make the symptoms a small part of your child's life. When symptoms occur...
  - Verify your child is in a safe place
  - Continue with your activity without attending to your child
  - When symptoms stop, continue activities as if symptoms never occurred
  - Do not talk about symptoms
- Stay calm even if your child is not
- Share your worries with other adults, NOT your child

### *Reinforcing and Practicing Coping Skills*

- Relaxation (deep/diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation)
  - <http://copingclub.com/amber-shows-some-belly-breathing-techniques/>
- Imagery (think about something enjoyable)
- Distraction (play a game, read a book, talk to a friend)

## Helping Your Child/Teen Manage Symptoms in School



In general...

- It's best for your child to attend school for full days as soon as possible, even before symptoms fully resolve.
- Work with school to set up a 504 plan for accommodations to help with success.
- Limit how much symptoms interfere with or change normal school activities for your child and for others in school.
- Minimize school's attention to symptoms.
- Plan for a time-limited rest break if symptoms arise at school.
- Have your child continue to participate in activities but have a plan to manage any activities that might worsen symptoms.
- Prepare a plan for your child to use coping strategies at school.
- Gradually and steadily increase your child's participation in physical & social activities he/she has been avoiding.
- Remember, maintaining school routines helps improve symptoms and functioning in the long-term.

References:

-Spirito, A & Kazak, AE. *Effective and Emerging Treatments in Pediatric Psychology*. Oxford University Press, 2006.