right Futures in Practice: Mental Health offers an array of suggestions for mental health promotion and the prevention of mental disorders. Deciding which of these suggestions to implement will depend on a variety of factors, including the personal style of the primary care health professional, the structure and setting of the practice, and the needs of individual children, adolescents, and families. The crucial first step is to decide that mental health promotion is an important part of health supervision and to address mental health within the primary care pediatric practice.

Perhaps the most important practice initiatives a primary care health professional can offer are to provide anticipatory guidance on mental health issues regularly and to routinely screen for mental health problems and mental disorders at all health supervision visits. Mental health screening is required as the standard of care for all children eligible for services through Medicaid’s Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) program. Screening can provide the basis for further targeted anticipatory guidance and/or interventions as indicated.

**Taking the First Step: Two Examples**

The two examples that follow provide specific suggestions for incorporating mental health promotion into health supervision.

1. In her medium-sized practice, Dr. Webster decides to incorporate systematic screening for mental health problems and mental disorders into each health visit. Understanding that psychosocial factors contribute greatly to mental health, Dr. Webster instructs the office staff to ask each family to complete the Pediatric Intake Form in the *Mental Health Tool Kit*, p. 4. For children and adolescents ages 4–16, she also asks families to respond to the Pediatric
Symptom Checklist in the *Mental Health Tool Kit*, p. 16, because it is well validated and easy to complete.

As the number of children identified with mental health concerns increases, Dr. Webster streamlines her office procedures for referrals to community mental health services. When a child and family need to be referred for specialized services, the office manager telephones the intake worker in one of the three area community agencies that provide child guidance and psychological assessment services. This personal contact facilitates both the referral process and prompt feedback from the agencies, including confirming that a family has followed through with the referral.

Dr. Webster also sets aside two 30-minute visits each week to counsel families who are hesitant to accept a mental health referral. In counseling these families, Dr. Webster uses *Bright Futures in Practice: Mental Health*, particularly the bridge topics, as a primary resource.

2. Mr. Chang, a family nurse practitioner, especially values the ongoing relationships he has developed with the families in his care. In addition to asking general questions about the health and development of the children, adolescents, and families in his practice, he emphasizes one age-appropriate topic at each visit. For example, at the 4-year visit he talks with parents about the child’s friendships and socialization skills. He uses the Developmental Checklist at the end of each developmental chapter to record which topics he has covered with each family.

When problems or concerns arise, he uses the tips in each chapter and in the *Mental Health Tool Kit* to provide brief, focused guidance. The staff nurse, who is also knowledgeable about *Bright Futures in Practice: Mental Health*, follows up by telephone, providing additional guidance to families. The nurse also assists with referrals to community agencies.

**Collaborative Practice**

Primary care health professionals will address the mental health of families most effectively if they coordinate efforts with other professionals who work with children and adolescents in an interdisciplinary team approach. In the context of family, friends, school, and community, children and adolescents interact with a broad range of other professionals (e.g., teachers, faith leaders, psychologists, counselors, social workers, dentists) who can play significant roles in promoting a child’s or adolescent’s mental health. For these professionals, the mental health guide provides an overview of the developmental patterns of child and adolescent mental health, and presents information on early signs of psychosocial problems and mental disorders.

This guide also offers primary care health professionals and other professionals a common language for discussing mental health issues and working together collaboratively. Although adapting these materials specifically for other professionals is beyond the scope of this guide, doing so will enhance society’s ability to meet the mental health needs of children and adolescents.

**Selected Bibliography**

