

Common-Elements Approaches: Brief Interventions for Common Pediatric Primary Care Problems

“Common-elements” approaches can also be used as brief interventions. They differ from common factors in that instead of applying to a range of diagnoses that are not causally related, common elements are semi-specific components of psychosocial therapies that apply to a group of related conditions.¹⁻⁴ In this approach, the clinician caring for a patient who manifests a cluster of causally related symptoms—for example, fearfulness and avoidant behaviors—draws interventions from evidence-based psychosocial therapies for a related set of disorders—in this example, anxiety disorders. Thus, as a first-line intervention to help an anxious child, the pediatrician coaches the parent to provide gradual exposure to feared activities or objects and to model brave behavior—common elements in a number of effective psychosocial treatments for anxiety disorders. Such interventions can be definitive or a means to reduce distress and ameliorate symptoms while a child is awaiting mental health specialty assessment and/or care.

The following table is used to summarize promising common-elements approaches applicable to common pediatric primary care problems.

| Presenting Problem Area | Most Common Elements of Related Evidence-Based Practices |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Anxiety | Graded exposure, modeling |
| ADHD and oppositional problems | Tangible rewards, praise for child and parent, help with monitoring, time-out, effective commands and limit setting, response cost |
| Low mood | Cognitive and/or coping methods, problem-solving strategies, activity scheduling, behavioral rehearsal, social skills building |

Adapted from Wissow LS, van Ginneken N, Chandna J, Rahman A. Integrating children’s mental health into primary care. *Pediatr Clin North Am.* 2016; 63(1):103.

References

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Note: This is excerpted from the [AAP Mental Health Competencies Policy Statement](#).