

GROWING UP

Just as the Doctor Ordered

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

Having just come home from the doctor's office, mom gives some antibiotics to her sick son. Her son takes the first dose, makes a face, and says, "It tastes awful! I am not taking any more!" The mom promises her son that he can stop taking the medicine just as soon as he is better. After a few days of cajoling, convincing, and bribing, her son is starting to look better. Rather than continue the antibiotics for the full treatment, the mom decides to take a break from all of the battles in getting her son to take his medication. The result is that the illness returns and her son takes twice as long to recover.

Not following prescribed treatment for illnesses or behaviors is very common. It is one of the major reasons that both medical and behavioral interventions fail. The truth is that both the medical and psychological professions have developed many interventions that are effective if treatment guidelines are followed. Unfortunately, following those guidelines can be a challenge.

The key to increasing your ability to stay the course with prescribed treatments and interventions is communication. Let's take the example at the beginning of this article. If mom knew her child would resist taking oral antibiotics and talked to her pediatrician, then the pediatrician could have suggested having a onetime antibiotic shot. This would have avoided the next few days of the mom battling her son to take the medication and her son would have gotten better sooner.

Open communication with your health providers allows them to modify interventions so that you will find it easier to follow through on treatment. If you don't tell your health providers that something won't work due to financial constraints or other issues, then the providers can't make changes. The end result is the intervention fails and your child continues to be sick or misbehave.

In addition to open communication with your health providers, you can create checklists that help you follow intervention suggestions. An easy way to do this is write down the steps to be completed and then make copies so you can check off when each step is completed over the ensuing days. If you are a smart phone user, there are apps for smart phones available that can send you reminders and track your successes.

Remember that there are a lot of proven, successful interventions for a wide range of problems. Increase your chances that those interventions will work for you and your family by communicating with your health provider so that it will be easy to follow "doctor's orders."

Biography:

Dan Florell, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at Eastern Kentucky University and has a private practice, MindPsi (www.mindpsi.net). Praveena Salins, M.D., is a pediatrician at Madison Pediatric Associates (www.madisonpeds.com).