

Navigating Pediatric Mental Health

A CLINICAL GUIDE FOR PEDIATRICIANS
AND PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS

Understanding levels of care and
referral pathways for children, teens
and young adults.



bend

Virtual pediatric mental health care for ages 1–25

Bend can help your patients get on the right path.

Pediatricians and primary care providers are often the first person a family turns to when a mental health crisis emerges, but the best path forward isn't always clear.

We know that assessing acuity, access, and family readiness can be challenging in a fragmented pediatric mental health system, so we've designed this toolkit to help you simplify the process.

This guide provides a roadmap for understanding levels of pediatric mental health care and how children and families can quickly get the correct level of support.





01

Identification, Referral and Level of Care Determination

When a pediatric patient presents with emotional, behavioral, or functional concerns during a routine well-visit, acute visit, or focused behavioral health evaluation, and clinical findings indicate the need for services beyond brief intervention or routine monitoring, a referral to Bend Health may be initiated for further evaluation and support.

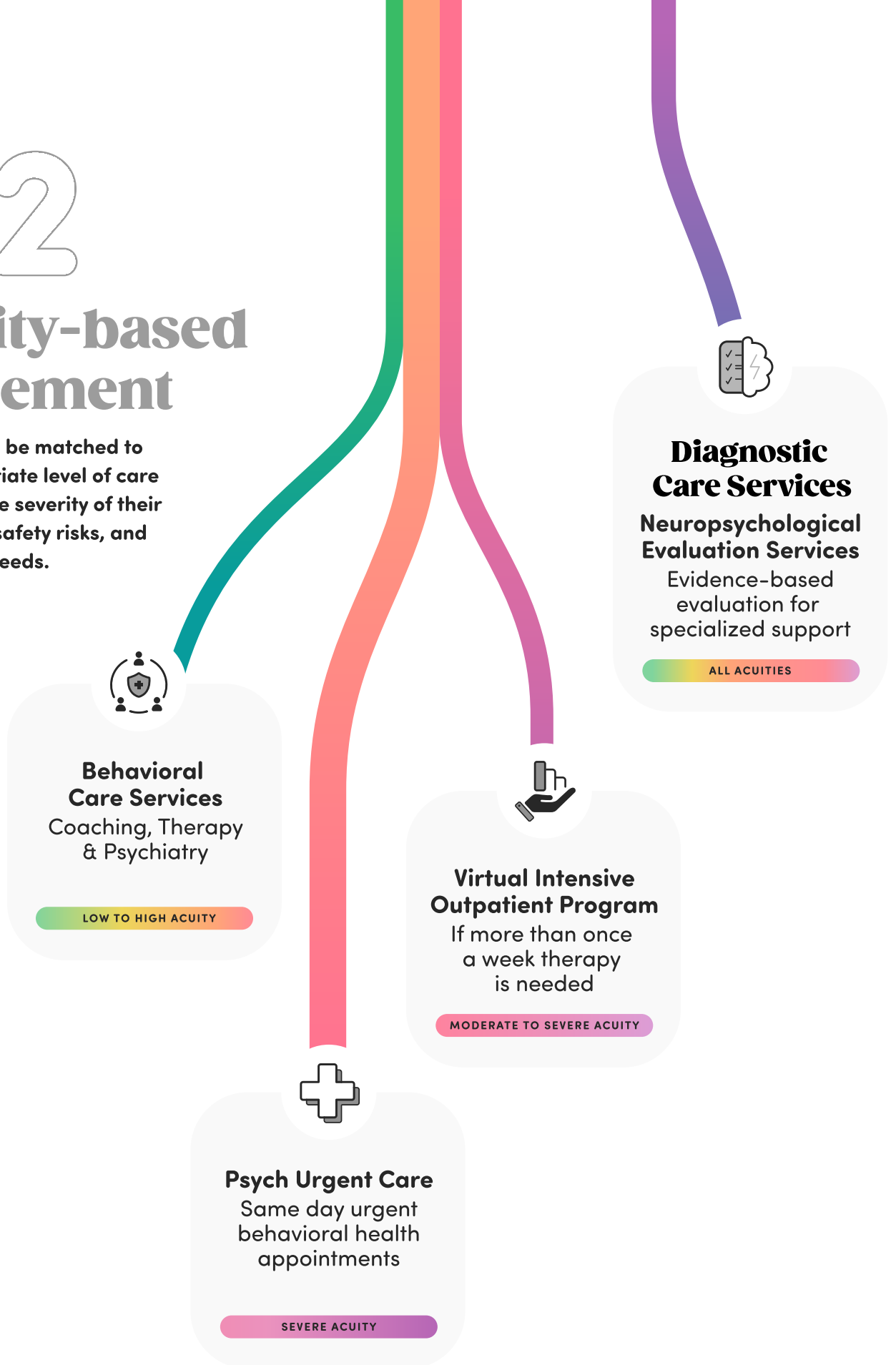
Following identification of a concern and placement of a referral, the patient enters a structured intake and triage process with our care team. A comprehensive, standardized assessment is completed to evaluate symptom severity and diagnostic concerns.

Based on results, patients are triaged into the appropriate program.

02

Acuity-based placement

Patients will be matched to the appropriate level of care based on the severity of their symptoms, safety risks, and functional needs.





Behavioral Care Services

Coaching, Therapy & Psychiatry

Ages 1-25

LOW TO HIGH ACUITY

Bend's Behavioral Care Services provide outpatient mental health support for children, adolescents, and young adults across a broad range of presenting concerns. Care is individualized, developmentally appropriate, and delivered virtually.

Clinical Focus Areas Include:

- ADHD
- Anger and emotional regulation
- Anxiety and depression
- Athlete-related stress
- Executive functioning challenges
- LGBTQIA+ affirming care
- OCD
- Parenting concerns
- School-related concerns
- Sibling and family dynamics
- Sleep difficulties
- Social media and technology use
- Substance use
- Trauma and stress-related disorders

Care plans are tailored to symptom severity, functional impact, and family needs, with the ability to adjust services over time.

Mental Health Coaching

serves as a proactive, skills-based intervention designed specifically for youth navigating early or mild emotional concerns.

Coaching focuses on the practical application of behavioral strategies to help patients manage daily stressors and improve their overall functioning. By prioritizing the development of tangible tools, coaches empower patients to reach personal goals through a structured, action-oriented approach to wellness.

Therapy

is a specialized level of care led by a licensed professional who is trained to diagnose and treat more persistent emotional or behavioral symptoms. This approach is essential for patients experiencing anxiety, depression, trauma, or significant adjustment difficulties that interfere with their daily lives.

By utilizing evidence-based modalities, a therapist helps the patient explore the impact of past experiences on their current well-being, providing a space to process complex emotions and develop long-term resilience.

Psychiatric Services

are provided by board-certified psychiatrists or nurse practitioners who specialize in the medical management of mental health conditions.

Psychiatric care is often provided alongside therapy to ensure a comprehensive treatment plan; while the therapist focuses on behavioral and emotional processing, the psychiatric provider oversees medication management to stabilize neurobiological factors and optimize the patient's overall recovery.



Virtual Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)

Higher level of care

Ages 7-25

MODERATE TO SEVERE ACUITY

Bend's virtual IOP is designed for patients requiring a higher level of care than standard outpatient therapy but who do not require inpatient or residential treatment.

This program specifically addresses severe clinical challenges including:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Self-harm
- Suicidal ideation

Unlike residential or inpatient programs, IOP is structured to allow patients to continue with daily life including attending school and engaging in social activities while receiving intensive, focused care.

Indications for IOP

- Moderate to severe depression or anxiety
- Limited response to weekly outpatient therapy
- Functional impairment across school, family, or social settings

Program Overview

- Virtual delivery
- Increased frequency of therapeutic interventions
- Multidisciplinary clinical oversight
- Average duration: 6–12 weeks, based on clinical need

This program allows patients to receive intensive support while remaining in their home environment.



Psych Urgent Care

Same day urgent behavioral health appointments

Ages 1-25

SEVERE ACUITY

Bend's Psych Urgent Care Program offers same-day/next day access to urgent mental health support for youth ages 1-25. Appointments are only available via referral from health plans, health systems, and providers.

Psych Urgent Care appointments provide fast access to therapy and psychiatric virtual visits for urgent behavioral health concerns, including:

- Crisis stabilization
- Suicidal ideation (if no plan)
- Self-harm
- Aggression
- Severe panic attacks
- And more.

Psych Urgent Care appointments can help families avoid overwhelming ER visits or ensure timely outpatient follow-up after inpatient or ER discharge.

Here's how it works:

Immediate Support

Providers and participating health plans can call to refer and schedule a patient for a virtual Psych Urgent Care appointment.

Professional Evaluation

During the appointment, a therapist will conduct an evaluation and provide immediate support and safety-focused interventions to the patient and their family. If a medication evaluation is needed, a follow-up call with a psychiatric provider will be scheduled.

Customized Care Plans

The clinician will help the patient and family navigate next-steps, determining the appropriate level of follow-up care. This may include intensive outpatient care, collaborative care, neuropsychological evaluation, or other support services.



Diagnostic Care Services

ALL ACUITIES

Neuropsychological Evaluation Services

Evidence-based evaluation for specialized support
Ages 2-25

About our evaluations

Bend Health's virtual testing approach is convenient for families. Our care team uses a child-centered approach and validated assessments to provide valuable insights into a patient's emotional, and behavioral functioning. These assessments are carefully selected from reputable publishers such as Pearson, PAR (Psychological Assessment Resources), WPS (Western Psychological Services), and other validated sources.

A comprehensive approach to care

Our licensed experts take a multidisciplinary approach to assure the highest quality. The Bend Health evaluations team includes psychometrists, psychologists, neuropsychologists, and psychiatrists. All tests and reports are reviewed by a licensed neuropsychologist or psychiatrist.

And the best part?

We'll provide your patient's results within weeks!

What patients are saying

"The report we got was very good. I took it to her school and they were very pleased with how much detail was in it and the number of recommendations that were given. They thought it was the best assessment they've ever seen."

Jayne A., parent

"I give them a 10! I actually recommended Bend to someone recently."

Dawn S., parent

03

Virtual care for kids and teens



As a pediatric provider, you know the barriers families face when seeking mental health support: months-long waitlists, the logistical headache of mid-day appointments, and the clinical anxiety that can make kids shut down.

why it works

At Bend Health, we've reimagined mental health care to meet kids and teens where they feel most comfortable. Through virtual appointments, families can access convenient care that fits into their busy schedules while achieving superior outcomes.

The power of environmental familiarity

Telehealth research demonstrates comparable therapeutic alliance and engagement outcomes to in-person care for youth. In fact, video sessions often allow kids to open up faster because they are in their own familiar environment. When children participate from home, they experience reduced initial anxiety. This allows our clinicians to spend less time on environmental acclimation and more time on meaningful therapeutic work from minute one.

A customized approach for every developmental stage

Delivering care virtually to kids and teens requires creativity, and that's built into our model. Bend clinicians adapt their evidence-based techniques to suit the specific developmental needs of each age group. And many of the same engagement strategies used in in-person therapy translate very effectively into the virtual environment.

Outcomes that speak for themselves

We believe in data-driven care. When you refer a patient to Bend Health, you aren't just sending them to a platform; you are sending them to a clinical model with proven results:

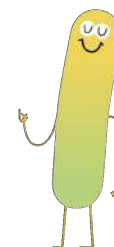
95% symptom improvement:

95% of members demonstrate improved symptoms over baseline.

50% average improvement score: Sustained improvement across all Bend Health members.

80% long-term engagement:

80% of members continue their care journey beyond 5 months.



For children (ages 1–12):

Incorporating play and imagination

Many providers wonder if younger children can stay engaged virtually and the answer is they can and they are having fun in the process! By utilizing structured, remote-first tools, we transform the session into a collaborative environment:

- **Virtual dollhouse and sandbox:** Clinicians use these interactive tools to help children express complex feelings and tell stories through creative play.
- **Bend Buddies™:** Our exclusive cast of characters helps families develop a shared language for core emotions.
- **Interactive games:** Tools like the Bend Buddy Wheel encourage children to identify feelings and connect emotions to behaviors through screen-shared play.
- **Caregiver integration:** Virtual care allows parents to participate more easily, learning real-time coping strategies they can implement at home.

For teens & young adults (ages 13+):

Building trust and honoring privacy

For teens and young adults, virtual therapy feels natural and offers a safe space to connect. For this group, virtual care offers:

Enhanced independence: Teens can engage from their own safe space, giving them a sense of control over their healing journey.

Seamless integration: Whether they are managing a heavy high school course load or transitioning to college, virtual care fits into their schedule, increasing consistency and reducing “no-shows.”

Beyond the session:

Tools to support, every step of the way

Effective virtual care extends past the session. We provide families with evidence-based tools to support progress between appointments:

- **Support between sessions.** Members and caregivers can connect with our team anytime through secure chat for support or scheduling help.
- **Learning resources:** Members and their families have access to an extensive interactive library of content to help them practice skills between sessions.
- **Curated music playlists:** Utilizing music therapy elements to help with emotional regulation.
- **Relaxation & breathing exercises:** Recorded resources that patients can access anytime they feel overwhelmed.
- **A full continuum of care:** Patients can access all levels of care without leaving the Bend ecosystem, ensuring no gaps in support.



we're here to partner with you

Our goal is to be a seamless extension of your pediatric practice. By removing the barriers of travel and environmental stress, we help your patients get the care they need, exactly when they need it. Ready to refer? Learn more about how we partner with pediatricians to provide evidence-based, play-centered virtual care at BendHealth.com/refer.

Navigating Mental Health in the Exam Room

Here are some
tips and scripts to
empower you and
your patients:

04

Start by normalizing the conversation.

The goal is to frame mental health as a vital sign—no different than height, weight, or blood pressure. This reduces stigma before the conversation even begins. Try using phrases like “big feelings” or “brain health” for younger children, and “stress management” or “mental fitness” for adolescents.

Get clinically curious.

Practice active listening by making eye contact and even sitting down to help the family feel more comfortable. If the child is old enough, address them first during the conversation. After asking a curious question, try waiting 5 to 10 seconds because that is where many people find the courage to share the most important piece of information.

Validate the parent.

Disrupt parental guilt by normalizing any concerns that come up and let the parent know that you are there to support them every step of the way.

Bridging the gap between physical health and emotional resilience in the pediatric exam room.

Get curious about specific parts of their day, like “How was recess today?” or “Who did you sit with at lunch?”

Here is a script:

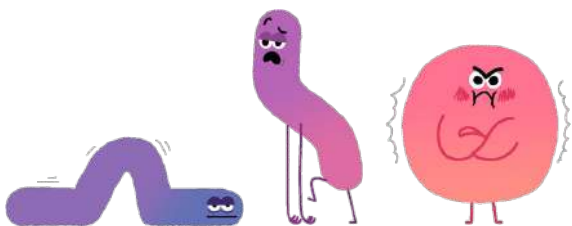
“During well-visits, I make it a point to check in on ‘whole-body health.’ This means we discuss nutrition and sleep, but also how [Patient’s Name] is feeling emotionally and how things are going at home and at school. Mental health is just as important as physical health for their development. I’d like to spend a few minutes focusing on that piece of the puzzle. Is that okay with you?”

Here is a script:

“I heard you mention that [Patient’s Name] has been feeling more down or ‘on edge’ lately. I’m glad you shared that—it’s actually something I’m seeing a lot of right now. Can you tell me more about what those moments look like?”

Here is a script:

“You’re doing exactly what a great parent does by noticing these shifts early. Navigating these emotional waves is challenging, and you aren’t alone in this. We’re going to build a support system together.”





Our personalized, evidence-based programs support kids, teens and young adults in building resilience, emotional awareness, and coping skills that last well beyond the holidays.

Coverage Options

Bend's care services are in-network with major insurance plans. Bend will work with families on coverage through health plans and finance/payment plan options.

We do not accept Medicaid at this time.

