

Introduction to Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Introduction to Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Key concepts, scope, and foundational knowledge for students and clinicians

1. Definition & Scope

Aspect	Description
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (CAP)	A medical subspecialty focusing on the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health disorders in individuals from birth through late adolescence (0–18 years).
Core Goals	- Promote healthy emotional, cognitive, and social development - Prevent onset or worsening of psychiatric illness - Reduce functional impairment and improve quality of life
Population Served	Infants, toddlers, school-age children, and teenagers; includes those with neurodevelopmental, mood, anxiety, psychotic, and behavioral disorders, as well as trauma-related conditions.

2. Developmental Foundations

Developmental Domain	Milestones (Typical Ages)	Relevance to Psychiatry
Physical/Neurological	0–2 yr: rapid brain growth, myelination 3–5 yr: refinement of motor skills 6–12 yr: synaptic pruning, increased executive function	Early brain injury or atypical development can predispose to neurodevelopmental disorders (e.g., ADHD, autism).

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Developmental Domain	Milestones (Typical Age)	Relevance to Psychiatry
Cognitive	• 0-2yr: sensorimotor (Piaget)	Cognitive deficits or distortions may underlie learning problems, anxiety, or psychosis.
	• 2-7yr: preoperational	
	• 7-11yr: concrete operational	
	• 12-18yr: formal operational	
Emotional/Social	• Attachment formation (0-2yr)	Disruptions can lead to mood disorders, conduct problems, or personality pathology.
	• Peer play (3-5yr)	
	• Identity formation (12-18yr)	
Language	• Babbling → words (0-12mo)	Language delays often co-occur with autism, specific learning disorders, and affect therapeutic engagement.
	• Simple sentences (2-3yr)	
	• Abstract language (12yr+)	

3. Common Diagnostic Categories (DSM-5-TR / ICD-11)

Category	Typical Age of Onset	Representative Disorders	Key Clinical Features
Neurodevelopmental	Birth-early childhood	• Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	Persistent deficits in cognition, communication, or behavior; often evident before age 12.
		• Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	
		• Intellectual Disability (ID)	

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Category	Typical Age of Onset	Representative Disorders	Key Clinical Features
Anxiety Disorders	5?12?yr (often earlier)	• Separation Anxiety • Social Anxiety • Generalized Anxiety Disorder	Excessive worry, avoidance, somatic complaints; may impair school performance.
Mood Disorders	10?15?yr (puberty)	• Major Depressive Disorder • Bipolar I & II	Persistent sadness or irritability; anhedonia; mood swings; risk of suicide.
Obsessive? Compulsive & Related	7?12?yr	• OCD • Tic Disorders	Intrusive thoughts, compulsive rituals, motor/vocal tics.

**Trauma? and Stressor

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