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Dr. Venkatesh Joins the Live Well Team as a Child Psychiatrist

Latha Venkatesh, MD, board-certified in child, adolescent and adult psychiatry, has been helping children and families her whole life. She comes from a family of doctors, and her father was a pediatrician. Venkatesh helped him at clinics in India, and even interned with him after receiving her undergraduate degree. She specialized in pediatrics in India. When Venkatesh moved to the United States, she completed her residency in pediatrics. As a pediatrician, she became interested in childhood neurology and development. Her interest led her to specialize in childhood psychiatry, specifically treating children with behavioral, emotional, and developmental disorders.

She recently joined the Live Well Community Health Center team as a child psychiatrist. The Live Well Centers are owned and operated by the Health Care Collaborative (HCC) of Rural Missouri. HCC has Live Well Centers in Buckner, Carrollton, Concordia, and Waverly. Venkatesh has treated a wide range of disorders, including attention deficit disorder (ADD), hyperactivity, depression, bipolar disorder, and behavioral disorders.

Venkatesh emphasizes how treatment for children differs vastly from the treatment adults receive for these disorders. She says children's brains and bodies are constantly growing and developing. Symptoms and even diagnosis among children are different compared to adults. "We cannot use medication like we do with adults," she said. "We have to be careful and cognitive of the child phases." Every phase of child development is different. Medications act differently at each age because of the different stages of brain development, she says. "The brain is a very sensitive organ, so we should nourish and grow the brain. I use medications, but I educate the family about them quite a bit."

Venkatesh is well-versed in psychopharmacology; however, she is a strong believer in using non-medication interventions first. "Diet in children is a main factor," Venkatesh said. Diet plays a major role in brain development and overall child development. "A lot of studies have come out about how sugar and artificial additives in different foods affect children," she explained.

The integration of both exercise and relaxation into a child's life are other forms of interventions. Mindful yoga practices for children is used as a form of exercise as well as a relaxation technique. Frequent use of television and video games doesn't promote relaxation, especially at night. Venkatesh says almost every child she sees has sleep problems. "We have to work with both the child and the family to educate them," she says. "The parents come to us for education. All parents want to do what is best for their children."

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Venkatesh educates parents about healthy routines like sleep, diet, and establishing structure and behavior management. “Children love structure even though they will try to resist it, but inherently they do love structure,” she said laughingly. “Supporting and educating the family is the biggest priority in treating children.”

Venkatesh has always been passionate about helping children who have developmental disorders. She has experience with individuals living with developmental disorders in both her personal and professional life. “I have seen several autistic children in my practice. While growing up, my neighbors, and even individuals in my family, lived with autism,” Venkatesh said.

Starting out as a pediatrician, and then specializing in child psychiatry, Venkatesh has always worked with children and their families. She expresses how crucial the family is in the treatment of the children she sees. She wants the families to be a part of the treatment plans and welcomes their feedback. “I want their active participation, and their input. I value their input quite a bit because they know their child best,” Venkatesh said.

As an addition to the Live Well family, Venkatesh says her goal is to provide the best service for the children and families she serves. She aims to treat the child and family together, not separately. “I want to develop a good program here at Live Well,” she says. Venkatesh is accepting new patients. Medicaid, Medicare and all major insurance plans are accepted, as well as a sliding fee scale for those who qualify. To schedule an appointment with Dr. Venkatesh, visit LiveWellCenters.org to find a Live Well Center near you. To apply for insurance through the Health Insurance Marketplace, call Iva Eggert or Shelly Harden at 660.259.2440.

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