How Do I Know
My Child Needs Counseling?

by Melinda Hammond, PsyD



Let's be honest, kids are a blessing, but they're also weird.

One day, they're your best little buddy, happy to tag along as you do yard work. The next, they're slamming doors and pouting because you put limits on screen time (ask me how I know!).

At some point, most parents have to ask themselves, "Does my child need therapy?"

Here are five signs that your child might need to see a counselor or psychologist. Our job as parents is to care for the children God has trusted us with, and that includes their mental health.

Your child asks

If your child asks to see a counselor, school social worker, or therapist, listen!

This is particularly true of teens, but even slightly younger kids will advocate for themselves. If your child says something like, "I don't want to talk about it!" don't hesitate to ask them if they'd like to talk to another, safe adult instead. Sometimes kids feel more comfortable talking about their emotions with non-parent adults. Don't take it personally - it's normal, and doesn't mean you're not doing a great job. In fact, it takes a strong parent to recognize when their child needs the help of an expert.

Your child's personality suddenly changes

While shifts in personality are fairly normal during puberty or times of great stress, if those shifts are sudden or drastic, it might be time for counseling. For example, if a previously outgoing child is suddenly withdrawing from others, or a happy child is suddenly tearful all the time, they might need someone to talk to. Similarly, if a child suddenly becomes impulsive or breaks rules after a lifetime of obedience, it might be time to reach out to a therapist. Prayerfully consider the ways in which your children change to discern whether extra help is needed.

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Your child's anxiety, depression, or behavior keeps them from things they used to enjoy

Like adults, it's normal for children to have periods of sadness or worry. And, just like adults, if that sadness or worry keeps children from the things they love, it's time to reach out. In kids, this might look like a child who is so depressed she doesn't want to play with her siblings any more, or someone who quits their favorite soccer team because of anxiety. In more extreme cases, this might look like school refusal (kids who refuse to attend school), or lying in bed all day. For some kids this might look like "acting out" - behaviors that get them removed from activities like karate or Sunday School.



Other trusted adults have concerns

Many kids are lucky enough to have "bonus" adults who care deeply about them - pastors, teachers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, coaches and more. This can be incredibly helpful for parents, because some kids act completely different when out of the house! In fact, if you have concerns about your child, reach out to the other important grown-ups in your kid's life - they might have valuable feedback, and can help you figure out if your child needs additional support.

Your child seems to be a danger to herself or another person

This is probably the most important indication to get help immediately. If your child says they want to hurt or kill themselves (or someone else), this is a red flag! If the danger seems immediate, you may have to take them to a hospital to keep them safe.

If your child needs counseling

Start with the school social worker, especially if the child's difficulties are impacting their schoolwork. However, if you, as a parent, need extra guidance on how to help your child, want additional support, or the school isn't able to help, CCCC has great resources and therapists, both in office and via telehealth that provide high-quality Christian counseling. ■



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