

When To Refer To A Therapist

Throughout your daily life you may notice that another person seems to be suffering or needing psychological help. Sometimes they may even trust you enough to open up about problems they are having in their personal lives, relationships and jobs. They may also ask for your help or advice. In many cases you may find yourself in a very difficult situation not knowing what or even if you should try to help or advise them.

Often other people's problems call for more experience and education than most people have, or call for the other person to be more objective about the problem than possible. At other times, trying to help or advise others about their problems would be inappropriate given the kind of relationship between the two people. This may be a time when the best someone can do for the other person is recommend they see a psychotherapist.

Psychotherapy is a way to help people work through the problems they are experiencing, so they can move on and enjoy a life that is productive and fulfilling. Some people seek out a therapist because their feelings are painful or disrupt their daily lives. Others see a therapist when they are unsatisfied with the direction their lives are going, or to eliminate unhealthy habits or patterns. These are appropriate times to refer others to therapy. However, seriously consider referring someone to therapy under the following conditions:

- When the person expresses or appears to feel hopeless and helpless
- When they are sad, blue, nervous, or tense for a prolonged periods of time
- If they have an inability to carryout everyday activities
- If they express a wish to "make it all go away"
- If you suspect they are being abused in some way
- These can all be serious warning signs of severe anxiety and/or depression.

What You Can Do to Encourage Another Person to See a Therapist

People who are having very difficult problems more than anything need encouragement. For whatever reason, they have probably become discouraged. The support and help of another person can give them the courage to take steps they might not otherwise feel capable of doing.

- Express your concern for their wellbeing by using fairly concrete examples of what worries you, i.e. sleeps most of the day, isolates from others, rarely laughs. Just saying, "You seem to be unhappy," isn't enough.
- Ask how you can be of help in getting them to a therapist. They may need someone to sit with them when they make the initial call or may need someone to accompany them to the therapist's office. They may also need help in deciding whom to see.

- Assure them that they aren't going crazy just because the problems are difficult enough to need the help of a professional. Willingness to get help when you can't handle a problem is a sign that a person is still functioning at a level where they are capable of making decisions and therefore aren't "losing their minds."
- Share times with the person when you either saw a therapist or considered it seriously.
- Plainly state your feelings that this problem is beyond your level of help. "I just can't help you with this particular problem" is best.
- Assure the person you will do whatever you can to support their work with the therapist.
- If the person is overly concerned about the cost of therapy, remind them that there are various resources like health insurance, sliding scale fees, medicare and medicaid that may help reduce the expense. Friends and family very often too have the same concerns you have and may be willing to help the person pay for therapy.
- If after you have done everything you can to get the person to therapy, and they either refuse or don't follow through with the plan to see someone, and you continue to be extremely concerned, ask for support and help from their friends and family in getting help for them. Try to assess who has the most influence with the person. They may be your best resource.
- If the person does follow through with the plan to see a therapist, acknowledge their courage in doing something that was difficult for them.