
Taking Your Child to a Therapist

What Is Therapy?

Many children and teens have problems that affect how they feel, act, or learn. Therapy is a type of treatment for these problems. It is a way to get help for your child.

In therapy, kids talk and learn how to work out their problems. Going to therapy helps them cope better, communicate better, and do better.

What Problems Do Therapists Help With?

Therapists are trained to help with all kinds of problems. For example, they help kids and teens going through **tough times** like:

- family problems
- school problems
- bullying
- health problems

They help with **feelings** like:

- sadness
- anger
- stress and worry
- low self-esteem
- grief

They help kids and teens with **conditions** like:

- ADHD
- depression
- OCD and anxiety
- eating disorders
- self-injury
- disruptive behavior disorders
- trauma-related disorders

Why Do Kids and Teens Need Therapy?

Kids and teens need therapy when they have problems they can't cope with alone. Or they need help when problems affect how well they do, feel, or act. If things don't get better on their own, kids may need therapy so

things can improve. Sometimes, entire families need support while trying to communicate, learn, and create boundaries.

How Does Therapy Work?

In therapy, kids learn by doing. With younger kids, this means working with the whole family, drawing, playing, and talking. For older kids and teens, therapists share activities and ideas that focus on learning the skills they need. They talk through feelings and solve problems.

Therapists give praise and support as kids learn. They help kids believe in themselves and find their strengths. Therapy builds helpful thinking patterns and healthy behavioral habits.

A therapist might meet with the child and parent together or meet with the child alone. It depends on the child's age. A therapist might also meet with a parent to give tips and ideas for how to help their child at home.

What Happens in Therapy?

At first, the therapist will meet with you and your child to talk. They will ask questions and listen. This helps them learn more about your child and about the problem. The therapist will tell you how they can help.

After that, your child will go to more therapy visits. At these visits, your child might:

- **Talk.** Talking is a healthy way to express feelings. When kids put feelings into words instead of actions, they can act their best. When someone listens and knows how they feel, kids are more ready to learn.
- **Do activities.** Therapists use activities to teach about feelings and coping skills. They may have kids draw or play as a way to learn. They may teach mindfulness and calm breathing as a way to lower stress.
- **Practice new skills.** Therapists help kids practice what they learn. They might play games where kids need to wait their turn, use self-control, be patient, follow directions, listen, share, try again, or deal with losing.
- **Solve problems.** With older kids and teens, therapists ask how problems affect them at home, at school. They talk over how to solve these problems.

How Long Do Kids Do Therapy?

How long therapy lasts depends on the goals you and your child's therapist have. Most of the time, a therapist will want to meet with your child once a week for a few months.

How Can Parents Help?

You can do things to help your child get the most from therapy. Here are some of them:

- **Find a therapist you and your child feel comfortable with.** Your child's health care team can help you find someone.
- **Take your child to all the appointments.** Change takes time. It takes many therapy visits for your child to learn new skills and keep them up.
- **Meet with your child's therapist.** Ask what to do when your child shows problems at home. Ask how to help your child do well.

- **Spend time with your child.** Play, cook, read, or laugh together. Do this every day, even if it's only for a few minutes.
- **Parent with patience and warmth.** Use kind words, even when you need to correct your child. Show love. Give praise when your child is doing well or trying hard.

Medically reviewed by: Colleen C. Cullinan, PhD

Date reviewed: March 2018

Note: All information on KidsHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

© 1995-2023 The Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved.

Images provided by The Nemours Foundation, iStock, Getty Images, Veer, Shutterstock, and Clipart.com.

