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## How a Counselor or Therapist Can Help Your Child and Family

Emotional and behavioral issues are often “part of the package” when you have a child with learning or attention problems. When your child’s low self-esteem, lack of social skills, or discipline issues start to interfere with your family’s everyday life, it may be time to call in a professional counselor or therapist to provide help. Below are some basic questions you might have about engaging a therapist, followed by information and suggestions.

### What are some ways that a professional counselor or therapist might help our family?

It’s hard to watch your child struggle unsuccessfully with difficult feelings or behaviors. A good therapist is skilled at helping your child identify and address feelings and behaviors that are keeping her from doing well at home or in school. In addition to addressing immediate issues, a good therapist can also offer your family some broad, long-term benefits, such as:

- Having someone who knows your family who you can turn to in the future, whenever your child or family needs help to address a problem
- Having a caring, objective adult who can provide information about topics that have become too sensitive or difficult to talk about in the family, such as medication, behavioral interventions discipline or sibling issues
- Hearing your child’s competencies, strengths, and gifts described by an objective “outsider” who has worked with lots of kids and families
- Being recognized by another adult for your own strengths and competencies as a parent
- Providing you a regular break from attending to your child’s needs.

### How do I find a good therapist?

Your choices and access to therapists may depend on the size and location of your community, your health (or behavioral health) insurance coverage, and your financial resources. One of the best ways to look for a skilled, experienced therapist is to get recommendations from people you know and trust. For example, the psychologist who sees your child at school may also work with children in private practice. Or he may know of other therapists who have a history of working successfully with children with learning and/or attention problems and their families. A pediatrician, or a prescribing physician for a child taking medications, are other sources of recommendations.

Therapists may have any of several types of college degrees and licenses, including:

- **Clinical psychologist (Ph. D. or Psy. D.), Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), or Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist (LMFT):** Provide non-medical diagnoses and therapeutic treatment of emotional and behavioral problems;
- **Child psychiatrist (M.D.):** Specializes in the assessment and treatment of emotional and behavioral issues; is a medical doctor who can prescribe medication.

Just as important as his degree or license, however, is the therapist's track record with children like yours, as confirmed by people in your community whose opinions you trust.

If you can, it is obviously best to engage a therapist who has training and experience with children with learning disabilities (LD) and/or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). If your child attends a public school, a therapist's experience with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and/or 504 Plans is also very useful. With this specialized background, a therapist knows intimately the environments in which your child and family function daily. If the therapist available to you does not have experience with IEPs and 504 Plans, be prepared either to spend some time "educating" him, or to deal with these processes without his help.

### **What questions should I ask myself before contacting prospective therapists?**

Before you start interviewing prospective therapists, ask yourself a few questions to help clarify your goals and expectations for your child's therapy. Questions such as the following may be useful:

- How urgent is it that my child receives counseling right now? Has she already got so much on her plate that therapy might put her in "overload?"
- What specific changes in my child's behavior do I hope to see as a result of therapy? What are my most important concerns?
- What if my child resists seeing a counselor or therapist? How can I talk to her about the benefits in a way she will understand?
- Can our family handle the demands of regularly scheduled therapy right now?
- What financial issues does our family need to consider in regard to therapy? Where can we look for low- or no-cost therapy in our community?

### **Finding and Interviewing Therapists**

Once you've thought about goals for your child's therapy and how to manage the logistics involved, make some calls to friends, school staff, or community service agencies to get the names of therapists they recommend. When you are ready to interview the therapists in person or over the telephone, you may find our "[Questions to Ask Counselors and Therapists— pdf worksheet](#) useful. In-person interviews can give you a feel for whether you have "good chemistry" with a therapist. The worksheet includes several suggested questions to ask therapists and provides a way to organize your notes, such as:

- What would a typical session with my child look like?
- Describe a typical session...
- How would you work with our family?
- What is your experience working with children with learning or attention problems?

Finding the right therapist to help a child with emotional or behavioral problems may take a little time. When you begin working with a therapist, be alert to how helpful and supportive the sessions seem. From your first appointment, you should feel that you are getting emotional and practical support you need to deal with your child's issues. As therapy progresses, your child should become more comfortable with the process.

You may begin work with a therapist, decide the therapist is not working out well, and have to start your search again. But if you persist, the benefit to your child and family can make the effort well

worth it.

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### About the Contributors

**Ann Christen** is a licensed marriage, family, and child counselor with extensive clinical experience working with children and families affected by learning difficulties, focusing particularly in familial issues. She is the mother of three grown daughters, two of whom have LD and the third who is severely disabled.

**Linda Broatch**, Writer/Editor, has an M.A. in Education, with a focus in Child Development, personal experience in supporting those who have learning difficulties, and has worked for many years in nonprofit organizations that serve the health and education needs of children.

### Other Resources

#### Websites

Sam Goldstien.com

The Role of Psychotherapy in the Treatment of ADHD

<http://samgoldstein.com/template.php?page=postings!!type=articles!!id=60>



# SchwabLearning.org

A Parent's Guide to Helping Kids With Learning Difficulties

## Questions to Ask Prospective Counselors or Therapists Worksheet

Counselor/Therapist \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email \_\_\_\_\_  
 FAX \_\_\_\_\_

Questions	Notes
What experience do you have working with children with learning disabilities and/or AD/HD?	
What is your experience working with children my child's age?	
What is your experience in the development of IEPs (or 504 Plans)?	
What would a typical session with my child look like?	
Could you describe how you would work with our family? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often would I get an update on my child?</li> <li>• How often do you like to work with parents?</li> </ul>	
Money is an issue for us. What could we expect to accomplish in a limited period of time in therapy?	
Do you currently have a regularly available appointment time?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
What are your fees? (Do you have a sliding fee scale?)	
What is your policy for cancellation of an appointment?	
Are you willing to work with my child's teacher or physician when necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

This worksheet offers **suggested** questions to ask when interviewing a counselor or therapist. Parents are in the best position to decide which questions are appropriate for their own family and circumstances. Please delete, revise, or add questions to make the worksheet most suitable for your needs.