

## How do I know if my child needs a counselor or therapist?

It is not always easy to determine if a child could benefit from professional help. Certain periods in a child's development, such as the "terrible two's" and adolescence, are commonly more difficult than other phases. But how difficult is too difficult? And what if the child does not grow out of the behavior in a reasonable amount of time? To help decide, consider the following:

- Are the intensity, duration, or frequency of the behaviors in question (e.g., tantrums, crying spells, aggressiveness, withdrawal) interfering with your child's functioning in school, at home, or elsewhere? Is she dropping out of activities she formerly enjoyed, avoiding friends, skipping school, or are her grades dropping?
- Are the behaviors causing problems in the family? Is there a sudden increase in sibling rivalry? Do you feel you have to "walk on eggshells" around the child? Have the behaviors caused increased tensions between you and your spouse?
- Has there been a recent change in your child's sleeping or eating patterns? Has there been a sudden unexplainable increase or decrease in his weight, or an increase in moodiness or irritability?
- Do you suspect drug or alcohol use?
- Have you noticed a significant change in your child's social behavior? Has your talkative, outgoing child suddenly become quiet and withdrawn? Is your normally quiet child having uncharacteristic outbursts?
- Has there been a trauma in the family such as a death or divorce that seems to be affecting the child more than you would expect?
- Does your child seem to have lost her love of life? Do you suspect she may be depressed?
- Has a teacher suggested that your child might have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or some other learning disability? Does the teacher's evaluation of your child's abilities differ markedly from your own?
- Do you suspect your child is concealing things from you? Do you feel you are unable to communicate effectively with him, or have your communication patterns changed suddenly?

## How do I find an appropriate practitioner?

First, educate yourself about giftedness, its characteristics and special challenges in order to:

- Evaluate whether a therapist has an understanding of giftedness among children.
- Recognize some of the common misdiagnoses of gifted children. Be able to discuss them intelligently with the therapist.
- Consider to what degree your child's problem may be related to his or her giftedness.

It is vitally important to find a therapist who understands giftedness and how it shows up in children. Certain gifted traits are often mistaken for learning disabilities or behavior problems.

*for more information  
visit [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)*

## Keep in mind...

- Reevaluate periodically. Is your child making progress? If the answer is no, don't be afraid to switch therapists.
- What works well for one child may not work for another. The quality of the relationship between the patient and the therapist is of the utmost importance. It must be trusting and workable, not adversarial nor unduly uncomfortable for either the child or the therapist.
- As the parent, you need to be involved in the child's therapy. This may mean separate meetings between you and the therapist or group meetings with the therapist and the child.
- Bright children can be very manipulative. They may try to manipulate you as well as the therapist.
- How you approach the idea of therapy with your child is extremely important. Emphasize the goal of feeling better and enjoying life and others more. Stress the benefits to be obtained rather than imply the child has a problem.
- If your child's school performance is being adversely affected, it may be important to involve school personnel. However, be sure that does not violate your child's sense of confidentiality.

## What questions should I ask when choosing a professional?

To determine whether a therapist understands giftedness and its related issues, consider asking some of the following questions:

- Do gifted children have special needs? How do they differ from non-gifted children?
- Are there any particular problems or behaviors that you see among gifted children that you don't see in the general population?
- What are some of the particular social and emotional needs you have noticed among the gifted children you serve?
- How do you distinguish among ADHD behaviors and similar behaviors that are attributable to being gifted?
- How does your treatment of gifted children differ from your treatment of non-gifted children?
- How do you define gifted?
- About what percent of your practice is made up of gifted children? Highly gifted children?
- How do you involve parents in the treatment of their child?

## Where can I find out more about giftedness?

### Books

*Guiding the Gifted Child: A practical source for parents and teachers*, by Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan. (1982. Scottsdale: Great Potential Press)

*Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, bipolar, OCD, Asperger's, Depression, and Other Disorders*, by Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, and Olenchak (2004. Scottsdale: Great Potential Press)

### Websites

[www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)  
(Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted)

[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)  
(National Association for Gifted Children)

[www.hoagiesgifted.com](http://www.hoagiesgifted.com)

Your state gifted organization's website.

## Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)

Many schools, communities, and organizations focus on the intellectual needs of their gifted populations. SENEG brings attention to the unique social and emotional needs of gifted individuals, which are often misunderstood or ignored.

By underwriting and providing education, research, informational services, and staff development, SENEG promotes environments where gifted individuals can develop positive self-esteem, thrive, and utilize their talents.

SENG is a 501(c)(3) organization, funded entirely by donations. Please join us in our work to increase understanding, knowledge, and services for gifted children and adults.

## SENG's Vision

SENG is dedicated to fostering environments in which gifted adults and children, in all their diversity, understand and accept themselves and are understood, valued, nurtured, and supported by their families, schools, workplaces and communities.



Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted  
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# Selecting a Mental Health Professional



for your  
Gifted Child

Supporting Emotional  
Needs of the Gifted **SENG**  
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