

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 Has your talkative, outgoing child suddenly become quiet and withdrawn?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*

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?