



BRADLEY COUNSELING CENTER

HOW TO KNOW WHEN KIDS COULD USE A THERAPIST'S HELP

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It's been a long couple of months. In many families, parents and kids have spent far more time together than before. Emotions are running high, patience is wearing thin—and some parents are seeing their kids in a new light.

Sometimes it's positive, like discovering how funny or adaptable your child really is. Other times, it's worrisome, like realizing that your child has become cranky and short-tempered. But how do you know if it's serious?

That's a tough question, especially now, when it's difficult to know if a child's behavior is tied to "adjusting to this situation" or has morphed into "something that needs to be addressed."

No parent can assess their child truly objectively. As parents, we see our children through our own lens. As a result, we may either minimize troublesome behaviors (because we don't want to think of our kids as having an issue) or misread "typical" behavior as part of a larger problem (due to our own frustrations and anxieties).

Unfortunately, both extremes can fuel repeating cycles of interaction that is neither helpful or adaptive to anyone. When this happens, it can be helpful to see a credentialed therapist. An outside expert can not only offer a more objective view of what is happening, but tools and techniques for managing the situation.

Not sure you're ready to go that route? There are distinct signs that parents can look for in their quest for clarity.

SIGNS IT MAY BE TIME TO ASK FOR HELP

Has your child's behavior or emotional responses changed recently? Departures from what's typical may indicate your child is struggling with something beyond current events. Specifically:

- Increased moodiness
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Eating more or less than usual
- Changes in activity levels
- Increased aggression
- Spending more time alone



These behaviors are particularly notable if they're impacting your child's everyday responsibilities, routine, and relationships. For example:

- Earning lower grades
- Failing to get chores completed
- Losing friendships
- Arguing with family or friends
- No longer enjoying things liked before

If some of these signs are present, it may be time to seek a professional opinion.

WHAT THERAPY CAN ACHIEVE

Some parents are initially reluctant to bring their children to therapy, but it can be a very helpful, positive growth experience. Therapists can not only help parents better understand the unique needs of their child, but provide tools for responding in a balanced way that helps build on their strengths and compensate for challenges.

In fact, therapy doesn't always need to be a place to address a "problem"—it can also be a place that helps family members build on individual and collective strengths in order to grow as a unit.

If you're curious or unsure, remember: there is no downside to reaching out for more information—not when it may benefit your child.

Bio: Dr. Sandra Clavelli, PsyD, Clinical Psychology, is Director of Clinical and Outpatient Services as Allendale Association in Lake Villa. Allendale's Bradley Counseling Center is currently offering phone and video teletherapy services to adults and children struggling with COVID-19 issues, experiencing other mental health concerns, or looking to build on their strengths. For more information, visit Allendale4kids.org or call 847-356-3322.