

Demystifying Therapy: A Parent's Guide to Mental Health Support



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When might my child benefit from therapy?

Anyone can benefit from therapy at any time, especially given kids/teens are changing and facing transitions and new challenges at all times. However, kids/teens can especially benefit when they're experiencing...

- Long-lasting changes in mood
- Big emotional reactions that are hard to recover from
- Less interest in activities or friends
- Changes in sleep, appetite, or energy
- Drop in academic performance
- Life transitions or stressors

What therapy looks like over time

- **Early phase**—building rapport and safety, understanding your child's world, setting goals together
- **Middle phase**—learning and practicing coping skills, trying new ways of responding, gradual changes in awareness and behavior
- **Maintenance & growth phase**—strengthening independence, applying tools across settings, fewer crises and faster recovery

What is therapy?

Therapy looks different for everyone and is tailored to each child's needs.

- A structured, collaborative space to learn skills
- A place to gain insight and practice new ways of coping
- A relationship built on trust, consistency, and emotional safety

What do kids / teens do in therapy?

- Learn how emotions work
- Understand thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Practice managing stress, anxiety, anger, or sadness
- Try new coping skills
- Build self-compassion and confidence
- Gain insight and understanding

What type of therapy is right for my kid?

There isn't one "best" type of therapy. Relationship and fit matter most! You can get a sense of fit by asking questions like...

- What's the main concern right now?
- Are we hoping for practical skills or deeper insight?
- Would structure or open conversation be best for my child?
- Do we need short-term or longer-term support?

COMMON APPROACHES

- **CBT:** practical coping skills/education on how thoughts, emotions, and behaviors interact

- **ACT:** mindfulness and values-based action
- **DBT:** concrete tools for intense emotions and impulsive behaviors
- **Psychodynamic/Talk/Play:** deeper exploration of emotions and relationships

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD OUTSIDE OF THERAPY

- Practice skills together
- Validate feelings before problem-solving
- Keep routines predictable
- Celebrate small wins
- Communicate with the therapist
- Model coping yourself

Confidentiality & Communication

Remember confidentiality is an important part of therapy as it helps kids feel safe to share.

WHAT'S PRIVATE

- Personal thoughts and feelings
- Most day-to-day session details

WHAT'S SHARED WITH PARENTS

- Goals and treatment plan
- General themes and progress
- Ways you can support at home

WHAT'S ALWAYS SHARED

- Risk of harm to self/others
- Abuse or neglect
- Serious safety concerns