

What is Good Child and Adolescent Psychological Treatment?

It's Muddy Waters....

Finding the right psychological treatment for your child and adolescent can be like finding a needle in a haystack. Often, we are unaware of the types of therapy that can be offered and there maybe a stigma associated with mental health treatment. Even with all of this confusion, therapy can have a significant positive impact on a individual's life and on those around them. The key is having enough understanding to know what to look for in a therapist. Here, we have provided you with some essential knowledge to help you choose.

1. Know the Difference Between a Psychologist and Psychiatrist

- A psychologist typically has the most training in talk therapy. That means that they do not prescribe medication but instead are well versed in various methods of psychotherapy (i.e. using language and behavior to effect change. Psychologists have their doctorate and have attended graduate school for 4-6 years.
- A psychiatrist attended medical school and are often MD's. They prescribe medication to treat a wide range of mental health issues. Generally, they are not as well trained in talk therapy.
- Social workers and mental health counselors have basic training in talk therapy and received a Masters degree. These professionals can be quite good but are more effective if they have continued their training with certifications in specific treatments.
- Coaches/Mentors are unlicensed and there is no known standard training. So, you don't know what you are getting.

If the only information you had was their profession, you might choose a psychologist. But there is more to the equation...

2. Hope that They Don't say that They are "Eclectic."

There is a lot to know in the field of mental health treatment. And, if you are a Jack-of-all-trades you are a Master of none. When you call up a therapist, ask them a lot of questions. Where were they trained? What's their area of specialty? What is their orientation? What age groups do they tend to treat?

Ask questions first about the clinician before disclosing the issues you want treated (even clinicians will change their stripes to fit the problem you want treated.) A skilled therapist might have 3 or 4 areas of specialization. For example, they could specialize in the treatment of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Specific Phobias, Tourette's Syndrome, and High Functioning Autism.

Being eclectic is maybe a guise for either having limited therapy experience or they may only have knowledge of one treatment style. So, make sure to ask about their experience and training first. Words like “evidence-based” treatment approaches often reflect up-to-date and effective training.

Check their website. If you want a generalist, then it should state that on their site. In contrast, if you want a place that specializes then it should clearly state the areas of expertise. At Therapy West, we clearly indicate that we treat children, adolescents and families and we use advanced cognitive behavior therapy. So we are not the right practice if you are looking for geriatric or elderly treatment for depression.

3. Show Me the Data

In today’s data driven world, therapy for yourself or your child should also be driven by clear results. The main term that you should be hearing from your therapist is “cognitive behavioral therapy” or “CBT.” CBT is the gold standard of intervention and is a broad term that encompasses many scientifically evaluated treatments. But the most important part is that it focuses on outcomes.

The main goal of treatment is change. So your clinician should discuss with you the improvement that you will likely achieve from therapy.

- How will your behavior change?
- What are the changes in your thinking you can expect?
- Which emotion is the focus of treatment?
- After a few sessions, you can ask how long treatment will last?

If there isn’t a goal, then where is the treatment headed? There is one caveat... although good treatment is based on years of evidence to support it, therapists can’t promise improvement. The effectiveness of treatment is dependent upon multiple factors (e.g., motivation, consistency of the sessions, biological factors), many of which are not in the control of the provider.

4. Some Evidence-Based Treatments

Below are some well-founded treatment approaches. If you don’t hear about them, it might be a good idea to look for another therapist for your child or adolescent.

Treatments

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
Exposure with Response Prevention
Motivational Interviewing
Behavioral Activation
Behavioral Practice
Assertiveness Training
Parent Child Interaction Therapy
Parent Management Training
Dialectical Behavior Therapy
Interoceptive Cue Exposure
Trauma Focused CBT
Comprehensive Behavioral Intervention for Tics

Problems

Depression and Anxiety
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
Substance Abuse
Depression
Social Anxiety
Self-esteem and Empowerment
Disruptive Behavior in Children
Oppositional Defiant Disorder
Borderline Personality
Panic Disorder
Trauma and PTSD
Tics and Tourette’s Syndrome

5. Never Be Afraid to Change Therapists

Therapists are skilled at building a good relationship with their clients-it is what we call the therapeutic relationship. This is an essential component to good care.

As a client, you will likely feel very connected to your therapist. Especially, given the fact that in this relationship you disclose your deepest and darkest secrets. But, for example, if you are depressed treatment should be about functional change outside the therapy office. Not only about having a shoulder to cry on-although that is important too.

If you are starting to notice a lack of progress and that the goals of therapy are not the focus, then make a change. There are plenty of competent therapists who you and your family will connect with and who can also help you meet your goals for change.

If you'd like to learn more or just ask some general questions about therapy contact us. We are happy to provide you with education to help you get the best care possible.