

How Will I Know If A Child Needs Counseling?

A loved one's cancer diagnosis impacts all members of the family - including children and teens. Parents often wonder when or if to get support for a child or teen from a licensed therapist.

All family members are likely to experience an occasional sleepless night, occasional feelings of sadness or similar changes in their daily lives in response to the cancer diagnosis. However, if a child or teen is experiencing changes in mood or behavior that are so frequent, so intense or so long-lasting that they are not able to easily participate in their daily routines and activities then a referral for counseling with a licensed mental health professional should be recommended. Additionally, if a parent's "gut" tells them that their child needs or would benefit from counseling or if the child asks for someone to talk to then counseling services should be sought even if none of the above behavioral changes have taken place. A recommendation for family therapy will benefit many families as it will help families have the important and often difficult conversations about cancer together.

If any child or teen engages in unsafe behaviors or threatens unsafe behaviors, against self or others, then a referral to a licensed mental health professional is a must. If the threat of harm is serious, i.e., threatening serious injury or death to themselves or another, then the family should take the child or teen to the nearest emergency department or should call 911 and request immediate assistance to assure the safety of everyone.

To look for a licensed mental health professional the family can:

1. Call their insurance company and ask for a list of in-network therapists who work with children and/or teens.
2. Ask the school counselor, family physician, or other trusted professional if there are therapists they typically refer to.
3. Go to [PsychologyToday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com) and search for a therapist filtering by zip code, insurance accepted, age of client and issues (Look for therapists who list grief and trauma as issues. It is rare to find a therapist who lists cancer or illness as areas of expertise.). For



Cancer Patient Support Program

children under the age of ten a therapist who has at least some training in play therapy is recommended.