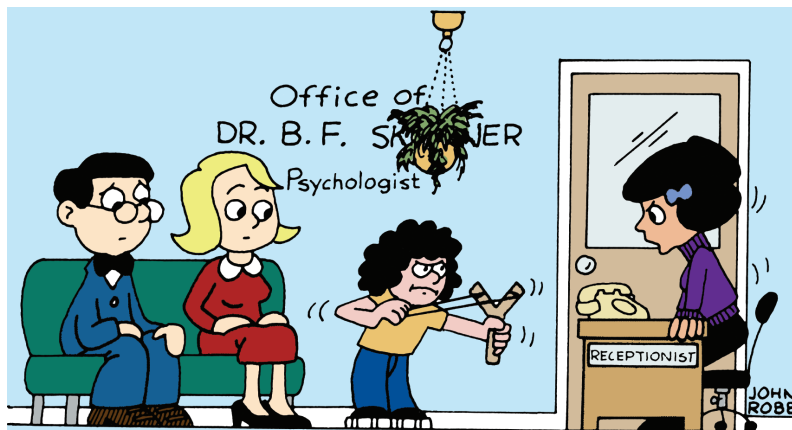
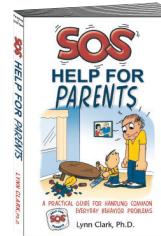


by Lynn Clark, Ph.D.

Chapter 22

Getting Professional Help For Your Child



"Can family counseling help us with our little Tiffany?"

Raising your child from infancy through adolescence is a long and sometimes difficult journey. Problems can arise and interfere with your family's well-being and happiness. If difficulties persist in spite of your efforts to resolve them, avoid giving in to hopelessness, inactivity, guilt, depression, or anger. Contact a counselor or therapist for professional help. Consider the following questions and suggestions when thinking about counseling for your child or family.

Q: ***"When should I get professional help for my child?"***

A: As a parent, it's your responsibility to help your child and family to understand and solve problems. *Consider getting professional help if your child is persistently unhappy or has significant difficulty in adjusting to*

B. F. Skinner gave me permission to use the above cartoon in SOS.

school, peers, or other family members. Professional help may also be needed if your child is causing you or other family members a lot of distress. You may feel that your usual methods of managing your child aren't working or that your child's behavior is beyond control. If your child becomes violent when disciplined or won't cooperate with the time-out method, then you and your child may need some direct help from a professional counselor.

Q: ***"How do I learn about professional counseling services in my area?"***

A: It often requires a lot of effort to learn about competent counselors and appropriate helping agencies in your community. Most pediatricians and family physicians can advise you about local family therapists and counselors. Ask your physician to recommend the names of at least two counselors. Some physicians may prematurely reassure worried parents with, *"Your child is just going through a stage"* or, *"He'll outgrow all those problems."* Consider what your physician says, but also discuss the indications and benefits of counseling with one of the counselors.

When contacting your pediatrician or physician, you may wish to discuss the possibility of a complete physical examination for your child before counseling begins. If your pediatrician suggests medication to help control your child's behavior, you might consider also getting a second opinion from another pediatrician. Several books listed in Chapter 21 discuss medication and behavior.

Other sources of information about counselors or appropriate agencies include school principals and counselors, teachers, ministers, and friends. Most telephone crisis lines and community mental health centers are also valuable sources of information about available counseling services. Telephone directories list psychiatrists, psychologists, marriage and family counselors, and clinical social workers.

If your child has a learning problem at school, he should be seen by a qualified psychologist for an evaluation that includes psychological testing. Most school systems provide a psychological evaluation

with recommendations if a child is experiencing learning or behavior problems at school. However, the thoroughness of psychological evaluations provided by schools is quite variable. Also, schools don't provide parent-child counseling services.

Professionals who offer therapy and counseling to children and adults, include psychiatrists (M.D.), psychologists (Ph.D., Psy.D., M.A., or M.S.), marriage and family counselors (Ph.D., M.A., or M.S.), and clinical social workers (M.S.W.). Most states require that mental health professionals be certified or licensed.

Q: ***“What do I ask the family counselor during our first contact?”***

A: After obtaining the names of a couple of counselors or counseling agencies, you will need to telephone a counselor or agency. If the counselor is in private-independent practice, make a list of questions, and ask to speak directly with the counselor. Briefly, tell the counselor the nature of your child's difficulties. Ask if he helps children with such difficulties. If not, ask whom he would recommend to help you and your child. Inquire about the training, experience, and certification he has for working with children and families. Ask about the cost of each visit, how many visits will probably be necessary, and over what period of time. When first beginning counseling, weekly visits are important.

You will be given an appointment to meet with an “intake worker” if you contact a *mental health agency* for professional services. After meeting with you and your child, the intake worker will discuss your child's difficulties with other professional staff members. The agency will decide which professional is available and qualified to help you and your child. Then the agency will set a second appointment for you to meet with your counselor.

Q: ***“How do I tell my child that we are going to see a family counselor?”***

A: Use direct, simple language when telling your child that the family or the two of you are going to meet with a counselor. Be positive and tell your child that the

counselor will help to solve problems. For example, you might say, *“Everyone in our family has been arguing a lot the last few months. We have an appointment with a counselor who will help us to understand our problems and to get along better.”*

If your child has been receiving low grades in school, you might say, *“We’re going to meet with a psychologist. She’ll give you some tests, talk to you, and talk to me also. She’ll offer us some ideas about how to help you with your schoolwork and grades. We have an appointment Wednesday afternoon.”*

Four Approaches To Helping Children And Parents:

- ***The counselor does therapy directly with the child.*** Most parents probably expect this treatment method, although this approach by itself is limited in its effectiveness. **In my judgement, the counselor should spend most of each session teaching the parents improved methods for helping their child, especially if the child is eleven or younger.**
- ***The counselor teaches parents new methods for helping and managing their child.*** You also may be asked to participate in parent education classes or read parenting materials, perhaps SOS.
- ***The counselor helps parents to understand and resolve their personal problems.*** Such problems often include depression, life crises, or marital difficulties.
- ***The counselor meets with the entire family in counseling sessions.*** Some problems are best treated by working with the whole family at one time.

Q: “What should I expect when we begin counseling?”

A: The first couple of sessions will focus on evaluation and assessment. The counselor will help evaluate and clarify the problems confronting you and your family. Since your spouse is a central part of the family, he or she should also become involved in counseling. In addition to talking with you about your child’s difficulties, the counselor will ask about the expectations and goals that you have as a

parent. You'll fill out brief questionnaires and keep records of your child's behavior. The counselor will talk with your child and observe you and your child together.

Be willing to modify your expectations for counseling and be flexible in working with your counselor. However, always ask your counselor any questions that you may have. With your permission, the counselor may contact your child's teacher and recommend additional ways the school can help your child.

After evaluating the problems troubling you and your child, the counselor will help you to solve these difficulties. Depending upon the problems to be resolved, counselors may use one or more possible approaches.

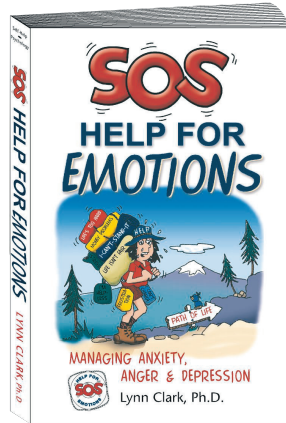
Q: ***“How do I pay for professional services?”***

A: Counseling costs money, but so do health care, education, transportation, family entertainment, going out to eat, and vacations. Counseling can help to reduce your child's behavioral and emotional problems and to increase his personal competence and social skills. It can improve the quality of family life.

Counselors in private-independent practice usually have a set fee for each counseling session. Community mental health agencies, however, usually charge on a sliding scale based on family income. To determine if your medical insurance might cover all or part of your expenses, check with your insurance company and talk with the counselor. If a public school system is providing psychological testing and evaluation, there won't be a charge. Your taxes pay for these services!

Main Points To Remember:

- Family and behavior problems sometimes become difficult for parents to handle.
- Counselors can help you and your family to resolve problems.
- Consider getting professional help if your usual methods of managing your child or handling family problems aren't working.



SOS Help For Emotions teaches adults and teen how to manage anxiety, anger, and depression by changing self-talk and irrational beliefs. Read a chapter on anger at www.sosprograms.com

Cognitive behavior therapy rests on behavior therapy. They share principles of behavior change and are compatible with each other.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy Interventions



Behavior Therapy Interventions



SOS Help For Parents is a primer on behavior therapy for professionals and a handbook for helping children two to twelve.

SOS Help For Emotions: Managing Anxiety, Anger, & Depression is a primer for professionals on cognitive behavior therapy and is a self-help book for ages 14 to 90. It is not a parenting book. See the description on pages 243 to 246.