

When young people don't want therapy

Sometimes, when things get difficult in family relationships, parents decide that they want their children (or one of their children) to go to therapy. And quite often, the children don't want to go. This handout is designed to talk about some of the concerns I hear about and to explain some of the ways that therapy can be helpful. Review these items and discuss them with your child or teen:

I don't need to go to therapy!

When you are told that you should go to therapy, it can feel as though you are being held responsible for what's happening ... as though you made mistakes and they are sending you to get fixed! A good therapist tries to understand how relationships in your family became difficult. He or she will try to figure out *with you* how to make things better --and they won't assume it's all your fault.

But there's nothing wrong with me!

Sometimes that's true! Sometimes parents do get worried when things are actually going O.K. But that can be a problem too. A therapist can help families see what the normal ups and downs are, and make some suggestions to help things run more smoothly. Therapy can really help families be more relaxed about things.

Kids would make fun of me for going to therapy!

Nobody needs to know that you are going. Your therapist will keep it private. You could think of therapy as a kind of tutoring!

Only crazy people go to counseling!

You'd be surprised if you knew how many people you know go to therapy! It's more like having a "feelings checkup" or preventive health care. It's about taking care of stressful stuff before it gets to be troublesome.

I don't want everyone to know about my thoughts and feelings!

Your therapist will make it clear to your parents that your confidentiality will be maintained. That means that what you talk about in therapy will not be told to other people, even your parents, without your permission. This is a promise to be kept with just a couple of exceptions. For example, if you are being hurt by someone or likely to do harm to yourself or someone else. Your therapist will try to help you to talk to your family about hard stuff, but will understand that you need time and privacy to figure things out.

But I know what needs to change, they just won't listen to me!

Your therapist can help a lot with communication by having family meetings and helping you to be clear about your feelings and reasons. Sometimes, too, parents are talking in ways that get misunderstood and counselors can help to sort that out.

It would be embarrassing talking to some stranger!

Part of the therapist's job is to find ways to make you comfortable. Sometimes they have art materials or other activities that help you explain things without just talking.

It's hard to get the idea about therapy unless you give it a try. Sometimes young people agree to go a few times, and their parents say that they can stop if they truly hate it after trying it out! Therapy really does help lots of young people and their families.

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