

## HANDOUT FOR PARENTS

### When to Seek Help

Counseling can be beneficial anytime you are concerned about mental health issues, but it is time to seek help when you recognize these warning signs:

- Marked decline in school performance
- Marked changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Head banging, picking on skin, biting, or self-harm
- Withdrawal from family, friends, and even fun activities
- Hyperactivity, fidgeting, constant movement beyond regular playing
- Frequent, unexplainable temper tantrums, persistent disobedience or aggression
- Sustained depressed mood, which may include threats to harm or kill oneself or others
- Frequent physical complaints and unexplained stomachaches, headaches or other pains
- Regression to an earlier developmental stage – soiling, bedwetting, sucking their thumb, baby talk
- Persistent nightmares, fear of the dark, not wanting to be alone, clingy behavior, excessive whining

### Finding a Therapist that's the Right Fit for your Child and your Family

Here are some tips help you navigate the search:

- **Start with asking a trusted friend and/or your child's school counselor and pediatrician** Who would they recommend.
- **Online resources, such as [www.PsychologyToday.com](http://www.PsychologyToday.com)**, provide a directory of therapists in your community. Photos and personal statements give you an initial impression and filters help narrow the search for clinicians that specialize in working with children and are in network with your health insurance.
- **Ask for a consultation** – Most therapists offer free consultations, a brief 10 to 15-minute conversation in the counselor's office or over the phone.
- **Ask questions** – *What is their background and training? What is their specialty, or how much of their practice includes working with children? How do they work with parents through the process? What do they recommend you tell your child about going to a therapist?*
- **Is there a specific issue your child is dealing with?** Many therapists are trained to deal with a variety of issues. However, if there is a more specific concern, such as eating issues, self-harm, trauma, OCD - be sure to make sure the therapist has specialized training to meet your child's needs.
- **There are different types of therapy that may be worth considering.** *Do you think your child would prefer play therapy? Maybe your teen might respond well to group therapy? Should the family attend family therapy together? Would your child prefer a female or a male therapist?*
- **Consult with more than one therapist**
- **Trust your instincts** – Does the therapist seem experienced, did you feel heard, were you comfortable, does the office feel warm and inviting for children?
- **Making the Decision** - Your child's emotional health is too valuable to jump into a relationship with a therapist that isn't a good fit. But with preparation, asking questions, and paying attention, you will be able to find a therapist that best fits your child.