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## **When More Help is Needed**

For children, the relationship they have with their parents is, and will most likely always be, the most important relationship they have throughout their childhood. As parents we provide for our child's emotional needs in so many ways. This begins with the moment the child is conceived and/or with the moment we hold our child in our arms for the first time. We shape their life--more greatly than any other person. Since we know this is an important job so many of us take this job very personally. We strive hard to be the best parent we can be. We read books, we take classes, we talk to other parents--and we integrate this new information with how we were raised ourselves--trying to determine what to do the same and/or what to do differently.

Since parenting is such a personal job, and so many of us put so much of ourselves into it, I think it is hard to allow ourselves to acknowledge that we need help sometimes. We think we should be able to figure this out ourselves--or what worked for our parents should work for us (at least partly!). Yet, each person born to this world is unique--so our child may not need exactly what another child needed. This means how we were parented may not work for them, or how we parented our child's sibling may not work for them. More and more research is showing that there are many different contributors to personality development--so our child's "wiring" may be completely different from anything we've ever seen before, leaving us feeling we don't understand our child at all. Or, our children may be exposed to situations that are out of our control--situations that have lasting emotional effects.

As parents I think most of us know when something is "not right" with our child. We can sense that they are anxious, or angry, or sad. I encourage all parents to pay attention to these feelings and not dismiss them as irrelevant. Staying "in tune" with our children's needs and responding to those needs is one of the best gifts we can give our children throughout their childhood. And as we try to figure out how to help our children it may be necessary (or best) to seek professional help. A professional psychotherapist who specializes in the treatment of children can help determine the right therapeutic interventions, so the child's current difficulties may have fewer lasting effects.

However, therapy is never a substitute for "good parenting." Children need a lot of help outside of therapy sessions. Having good parenting techniques in our tool box helps us be much more effective with our children. So, finding a therapist who works with the parents AND the child can help integrate specific therapeutic interventions into the home.

Some parents question whether or not certain behaviors are "normal" or "just a phase". Below is a list of behaviors that typically indicate a need for therapeutic interventions, especially if more than one of them is occurring at the same time. However, within each category there are varying degrees (mild, moderate, severe), so severe problems in these areas are much more concerning and will require more attention:

- Poor impulse control
- Aggression toward others (physical/verbal)
- Inappropriately demanding and clingy
- Deceitful (lying, conning) behavior

Sleep disturbances  
Hyperactivity  
Persistent nonsense questions, incessant chatter  
Difficulty with novelty and change  
Perceives self as victim (helpless)  
Intense displays of anger (rages that cannot be soothed)  
Frequently sad, depressed, hopeless  
Extreme mood changes  
Lack of eye contact  
Cannot tolerate limits and external control  
Lacks trust in others  
Manipulative, controlling, bossy  
Lack of remorse and conscience  
Does not like to be touched and/or tactily defensive  
Accident prone  
Poor hygiene  
Victimizes others (bully), seeks revenge  
Blames others for own mistakes or problems  
No stable peer relationships  
Indiscriminately affectionate with strangers  
Poor self-esteem  
Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly  
Victimized by others  
Difficulty with change  
Learning disorders/Problems in school  
Socially awkward  
Lack of cause and effect thinking  
Cruelty to animals  
Inappropriate sexual conduct and attitudes  
Pre-occupation or obsession with a certain type of object  
Frequently defies rules (oppositional)  
Abnormal eating habits  
Destruction of property  
Consistently irresponsible  
Stealing  
Unusually fearful  
Grandiose sense of self-importance/entitlement  
Poor organization and planning skills  
Delayed moral development

If you are seeing severe behaviors in your child, or have many different behavior concerns, seek professional help. The sooner you can find effective solutions, the sooner you and your child will find your way back to happiness together.

Happy Parenting!