

Does Your Child Need Therapy?

I remember the first time I took my 5-year-old to the therapist's office. I honestly thought it was going to be a waste of time. We were going to therapy because we were adopting from foster care and our DHS (Department of Human Services) worker suggested it. We were having BIG meltdowns and a lot of emotional issues. I knew we needed help; I just wasn't sure we'd be able to find it.

My doubts grew as I entered the office and met the intern, Brittany. She was the therapist, and she looked to be about 22 years old. (I'm sure she was a bit older.) She was young and perky, and in the back of my mind I thought, *I've been a mom for 23 years. Does she really think she can give me advice?*

Yet I tried to be open, and as I began to share about Isabella's issues, Brittany nodded. She wasn't surprised at all. It turns out Isabella's actions were very common for kids who've been through trauma. Brittany talked about an evidence-based therapy that would help. (More information about TCBT below.)

I assumed therapy would be about getting Bella to express her thoughts and feelings. (Isn't that what they show on television?) It wasn't that at all. Instead, the therapist spent half of the session working with Isabella on her behavior, and the other half talking to me. We discussed emotional triggers, anxiety and numerous self-destructive behaviors. Brittany taught me how to prepare Isabella for disruptions in our day and how to handle outbursts. She taught me how to connect with her, praise her and reward her for changes in behavior. And during every session this "veteran" mom was taking serious notes! My respect for Brittany grew with each session. **I realized that since every child is different, I'll always be learning as a mom.**

I followed through with what we learned in therapy, and my daughter began to change. Next, I took my 3-year-old son to therapy, too, and the new therapist taught me how to meet his needs. Our four older, adopted daughters are currently in therapy, and they have been for a year.

Since adopting six kids from foster care throughout the last four years, I estimate I've spent 800 hours with kids at therapy appointments! In addition to trauma-based therapy, my kids have done occupational therapy and speech therapy. Currently my son has an appointment and will soon be evaluated for sensory therapy. I don't shrug off the idea of therapy anymore—I run and get help!

I was a mom for 23 years before I ever entered the door of a therapist's office. With my three biological kids, I didn't need those services. Now I do. We do. There is NO shame in that.

God has brought amazing people into my life who have helped my kids heal and find wholeness. I'm forever grateful!

If you feel your child may need therapy, don't be afraid to seek help. My kids are doing so well now! They've overcome so much. They are living pretty normal lives, even though they've faced so much pain in the past. Your child can make huge transformations too.

Every child faces some level of stress or difficulties in his life. Most of these are mild and short-lived, but sometimes a child's problems do not resolve in an acceptable time frame.

How do you know if your child needs therapy?

Here Are Some Things to Watch for:

If your child has been abused or has faced trauma.

If your child has faced a significant life event such as the death of a family member, a divorce, a move or a major

illness.

If your child is harming himself or others physically or emotionally.

If your other children fear your child's behavior.

If your child's behavior is interrupting his daily life on a regular basis.

If your child is isolating himself.

If your child is regressing.

If your child has self-destructive behaviors.

If your child is overly anxious.

If your child thinks more about the past than the present.

If your child continually escapes from life in his tablet or on video games.

If your child's behavior interferes with the way your family functions.

If disagreements about your child's behavior are threatening your marriage.

If you have seemed to tried everything and don't know what to do.

Below are some resources, but the best resource are friends in your community. Who do you know who has a child in therapy? Would they recommend the therapist? Call around and see what type of services are in your area.

If you think your child may need therapy, you're probably right. Also, turn to God and ask Him for wisdom and guidance.

2 Timothy 1:7 says, **"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."**

Jesus wants our children to have sound minds, and when you seek Him He can lead you to the right help! Here are some places to start:

More Therapy Information:

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Focus on the Family: Find a Counselor

Resources for families:

Empowered to Connect

The Whole Brain Child {eo}

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