

UNITED
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

May 2010

“I Think You Might Need Professional Help.” How to Refer a Friend to a Professional

When a friend is facing trouble, they may turn to you for help. But sometimes the support you can give is not enough.

If a friend is suffering from severe depression, low self-esteem, an eating disorder or substance abuse, it's best to recommend professional counseling. But how do you make such a suggestion without offending him or her?

Plan carefully. Talk privately when neither of you will feel rushed. Use phrases such as, “I’ve been really worried about you...” or “I’m bringing this up because I really care about you...”

Your friend may say, “Everything’s fine.” If so, give examples of specific behavior changes you have noticed. Speak kindly, and don’t cast blame. Remember, you may have misunderstood their situation.

Give your friend time. Your friend may not want to talk. If he or she does talk, your job is to listen without judgment.

Use reflective listening. Reflect back what you hear to show that you understand. Saying, “I’m sorry you’re going through this” shows that you care.

Suggest sources of help. Ask if your friend has considered talking to a

professional. Many people don’t seek help because they think mental health services are for “crazy people,” or they feel they should be able to “get over it” themselves.

Here’s an example you can use: People don’t put themselves down for going to a doctor when they are sick. So they shouldn’t feel ashamed for getting professional help with stress, depression or other mental problems.

Mention that professional counselors and therapists treat more than mental illnesses. Emphasize that some problems may be too difficult for anyone to deal with alone.

Why People Don’t Seek Help

First, psychotherapy has a negative image: Many people believe it’s only for people who are “crazy” or mentally ill.

Some problems — like phobias or sexual disorders — may seem too embarrassing to talk about. When people are very uncomfortable, they don’t seek help.

Sometimes the problem — divorce, loss of spouse or loved one, financial trouble — seems overwhelming. Some people feel hopeless or think asking for help is pointless.

Another roadblock is denial. People minimize the problem, convince themselves that they are fine or fail to see that a problem exists. Denial is common in cases of alcoholism, drug abuse and eating disorders. Some people need to “hit bottom” before they admit their problem.

Finally, some people feel seeking help is a sign of weakness. They try to handle difficult situations on their own.

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Make it easy for the friend to seek care.

Employer-provided benefits such as an Employee Assistance Program can provide phone numbers of nearby professionals. The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (1-800-950-6264) can also provide referrals to professionals and low-cost programs in your area.

Reaching out for help is a big step. Suggest that your friend try at least one session and see how it

goes. Offer to go along if that would help.

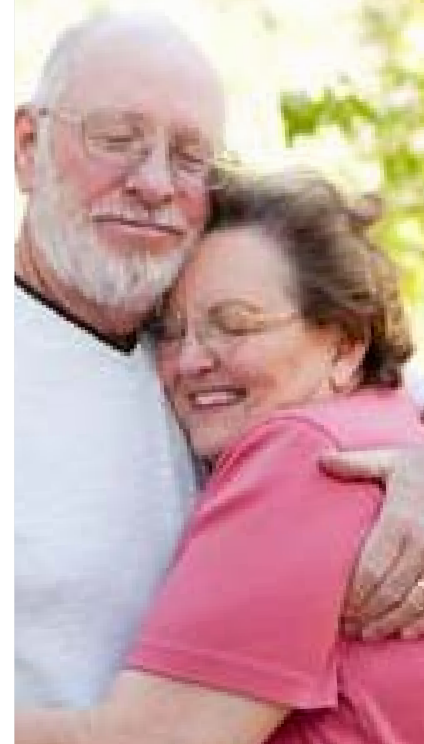
Be patient. Your friend may not respond right away, but you can talk again later. Remember, don't apply too much pressure.

It usually takes a lot of encouragement before someone decides to talk with a therapist or counselor. Once your friend takes the first step, let the counselor take it from there.

Continued Support

Even with professional care, change takes time. Stay in touch and keep giving encouragement and support. While the friend is getting professional help, he or she still needs your compassion and comfort.

Difficult conversations are never easy. But you don't have to go it alone. Logon or call UBH for more resources.



Types of Therapists

The term "therapist" or "counselor" refers to several types of mental health professionals. It may take some shopping around to find the right fit. It's good to check the counselor's credentials for a better understanding of their training and background. These definitions may help:

- **Psychotherapists** usually have a master's degree or a Ph.D. in psychology or social work. They may specialize in individual, couple, group or family therapy.
- **Psychologists** generally hold a doctoral degree (Ph.D.) in psychology and are trained to research

human behavior. They do practice psychotherapy, and may also be involved in psychological testing and diagnosis.

- **Psychiatrists** are physicians (M.D. and D.O.) who specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses. Some may also practice psychotherapy. Psychiatrists are usually the type of therapists who can prescribe medication, but Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) under the supervision of a licensed physician can also do so. Some states also allow licensed psychologists with training and

supervision in psychiatric medications to prescribe medications as well.

- **Professional counselors** may have various levels of training. Licensed counselors typically have a master's degree in counseling or a related mental health field. Counselors usually focus on specific problems, such as personal concerns, marital or family issues, chemical dependency problems or career decisions.

Resources

United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

www.liveandworkwell.com

The National Resource Directory in the "Find Resources" tab can provide toll-free numbers to support services for various life events.

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