

How to help someone who never asked for it

Adult therapy clients usually engage in therapy of their own free will and most adults have a pretty clear idea of the issues or concerns they would like to address in therapy. In addition, most adult therapy clients generally trust the professional role of the therapist, and in our experience, are able to open up about their thoughts and feelings with little difficulty. It would seem that the above points are more exceptions than rules with adolescent therapy clients. It is often the case, for example, that teenage clients do not know what issues need to be addressed. There is not always the same sense of trust and safety with the therapist – more often than not, it needs to be earned. Our approach may therefore involve taking more time to build the therapeutic rapport, which is necessary for anything therapeutic to happen. Sometimes teens may express that they do not want to talk to anyone or to be in therapy. If this is the case, it may be something to be worked-out in the therapy session – sometimes involving those people who think they do need to be there (i.e. parents).

Another challenging issue is when teens insist that they will not go to therapy. If this is the case, we encourage parents to reflect on why they believe their teen should go. Sometimes parents will have obvious concerns about their teen. These concerns may relate to taking care of their physical or emotional health, communicating effectively and respectfully with the family, or meeting age appropriate family responsibilities. It is the job of any parent to ensure that their teen is taking care of themselves in healthy ways. If parents have evidence that they are not, it is the parents right to urge their teen to get help. To motivate their child to do so, they may need use what influences they have, including the withholding of privileges until their teen can show them that they are taking steps to resolve real parental concerns - these steps may involve attending therapy. Privileges might include: T.V. time, internet use, cell phone use, weekly allowance, transportation, or anything provided by parents that are not a necessity of living or a 'right' for them to have. Even if teens end up in therapy to avoid losing a privilege, in our experience, they quickly learn that the individual therapy time is truly theirs and that it may actually be helpful.