When to Seek Agency Counseling for Your Child
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Professional school counselors are trained to address a multitude of students’ needs. They can help your child succeed in school by choosing appropriate coursework, identifying future goals, and managing everyday stressors and personal issues. Most school counselors also have been trained to utilize counseling skills and theories in order to assist the students in working through a variety of problems. But, what if you, as the parent, start to sense that your child needs more help? What if you are noticing some signs that are a cause of concern? How do you decide that your child needs more intensive counseling, and where can you get the information that you need?

There are many signs to look for when deciding if your child needs some support outside of school; “yellow flags” are harder to notice, but might indicate a need to delve deeper; and “red flags” are more obvious signs that something is troubling your child.

Some “yellow flags” are when your child:
- Withdraws from others. This might be normal for short periods of time, but persistently refusing to interact with friends or family could be a troubling sign.
- Expresses excessive anger. An occasional outburst may be normal, but frequent fighting, especially when it becomes physical, is a sign of concern.
- Complains of persistent physical symptoms with no known physical cause. There could be something happening emotionally that manifests itself in physical sickness or pain.
- Experiences a drastic drop in academic grades and homework completion. Your child’s grades may be a symptom of a larger problem.
- Asks to see a counselor. Especially in adolescence, it can be very difficult for children to discuss all of their emotions with their parents. Don’t be afraid to allow them access to an agency counselor, who can be an important resource for both you and your child.

Some “red flags” are when your child:
- Purposefully hurts him/herself. This can be self-mutilation such as cutting or burning the skin, or a suicide attempt.
- Expresses that he/she wants to die.
- Purposefully hurts other people or animals.
- Damages or destroys other people’s property.

If you notice that your child is exhibiting some “yellow flags”, discuss them with the school counselor. He/she may be able to help you assess the severity of the behavior and refer you to outside agencies that can address the problems. If you notice any “red flags”, you may want to act quickly, taking your child to an emergency room if they are hurt, and following through with the appropriate level of support with a mental health professional. This could be anything from inpatient psychiatric care to weekly sessions with an agency counselor. Regardless of the intensity of outside services, your child’s school counselor is always there as a support during the school day. He/she can work in conjunction with the outside counselor to provide the best care possible both in and out of school.

For additional information, please visit:
http://www.schoolcounselor.org

For more newsletters like this and information about the Collaborative on Early Adolescence, visit
http://www.niu.edu/cea/.