

Manchester-Essex Regional School District
Tips on Accessing Community-Based Counseling Services
for Your Child



What to expect when looking for a counselor:

The timeline for starting counseling can depend on insurance, time of year, and scheduling needs (there are only so many after school appointments). If a provider does not return your call in a timely manner, call the next person on your list.

The provider will ask some basic questions when you call to determine:

- Primary issues/concerns
- Brief family/life history
- Risky behaviors
- Family/custodial arrangements

Questions parents might ask the provider:

- Which insurance do you take?
- How do you build therapeutic relationships?
- How do you reach out to a resistant client?
- What is your area of expertise/approach?
- Are you or is your practice connected with a medication prescriber?
- What expectations do you have for the parents?
- What information from sessions will be shared with parents?

Please know it takes time to build a therapeutic relationship. Allow 3-6 sessions for the relationship to form before considering discontinuing counseling or changing therapists.

Sources for finding counselors are your insurance provider, the student's physician, and school counselors. **Remember, ultimately, your goal is to find a counselor that is a good fit for you and the members of your family.**

Release of Information:

The school or the counselor may ask you to sign a release of information. The purpose is to establish a working partnership and build consistency when the concerns leading to counseling also affect the student's school experience.

Brief descriptions of types of counseling:

Play Therapy:

Play therapy includes playing games and/or talking with the child. Children often work through thoughts, feelings, worries, and fears through play. Observing a child's play as well as how the child behaves and interacts with other adults and playmates can help the therapist better understand underlying issues and challenges.

Playing with the child can also give the therapist an opportunity to help the child experience new ways of looking at his/her feelings and the situation. Play therapy can help the child develop and practice coping skills and reinforces the child's innate strengths and capabilities. It is a gradual process of understanding the child and helping the child to adapt and cope. At times, the therapist may be observing the child and other times will be actively playing with the child. Both are part of the process.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT):

Cognitive-Behavioral therapy seeks to help the client overcome difficulties by identifying and changing self-defeating thinking, behavior, and emotional responses. This involves helping clients develop skills for modifying beliefs, relating to others in different ways, and changing behaviors. Treatment is based on collaboration between client and therapist and on testing beliefs. Therapy may consist of testing the assumptions which one makes and identifying how certain of one's usually unquestioned thoughts are distorted, unrealistic, and obstructive. Once those patterns of thinking have been challenged, one's feelings are more easily subject to change.

Family Therapy:

Family therapy is a type of counseling that helps family members improve communication and resolve conflicts. This type of therapy tends to view change in terms of the systems of interaction between family members. Family therapy sessions can teach skills to deepen family connections and develop capacity to work through stressful times. Family therapists believe that, regardless of the origin of the problem, involving families in solutions is beneficial. This involvement of families is commonly accomplished by their direct participation in the therapy session. The skills of the family therapist include the ability to influence conversations in a way that promotes strengths, wisdom, and support within the family.

Educational Therapy:

Educational therapy is specifically useful to children/adolescents with learning challenges such as learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder, and school-based anxiety. The therapist addresses both psychological and educational aspects of functioning. An educational therapist will work with your child to identify strengths and educate him/her about his/her learning difficulties. Using a strengths-based approach can help your child become more confident, self-sufficient, and successful in school. Educational therapists often collaborate with other individuals who are essential to the success of their clients. They may call the school, talk to other therapists working with the child, and meet with individual family members in order to better understand and treat their client.

Group Therapy:

In group therapy, a group of people come together to discuss personal challenges. Under the direction of the group therapist, the group gives support, offers alternatives, and comforts members in such a way that these difficulties become resolved and alternative behaviors are learned. The group also allows a person to develop new ways of relating to people. During group therapy, people begin to see that they are not alone and that there is hope and help. It is comforting to hear that other people have a similar difficulty or have already worked through a problem that is distressing to another group member. In school-based groups, the focus is often on teaching/building social skills, improving relationships with others, and learning new strategies for dealing with feelings such as anxiety, sadness and anger.