

# 3 *Levels* of Behavioral and Mental Health Treatment for Children and Teens



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## For many children and teens, managing their emotions and new experiences in addition to the developmental changes they're going through can be difficult.

On a given day, children and teens can face many of the same emotional struggles as adults, including sadness, self-doubt, anger, guilt, worry and much more. But children are not as equipped to understand how to respond to these feelings in a healthy way. When youth experience difficult emotions and hardships, the help and guidance of a caring counselor or therapist can have many positive, long-lasting benefits.

This guide is intended to inform you about some of the most common forms of counseling and therapy available for children and teens and how to find them. It also helps you understand the types of professional help you may want to explore depending on your child's level of need. While various types of treatment are discussed in this guide, it's important to work with a licensed professional to determine what's best for your child and family.



# For General Life Stress or School-Related Stress: School and Faith-Based Resources

## SCHOOL AND PASTORAL COUNSELING

The demands of daily life, including school-related stress, can take a toll on your child's mental health and wellbeing. Children and teens often exhibit signs of this type of stress in the following ways:

- Low self-esteem
- Bullying
- Poor school performance
- Classroom disruptions
- Other behavioral challenges



If you've noticed your child struggling with one of more of these behavioral challenges, a school counselor, social worker or pastoral counselor can be an excellent resource for resolving these concerns. Talking with counselors in your child's school or faith-based community is a great place to start.

## School Counseling

School counselors and/or social workers can help your child or teen cope with common stressors by equipping them with tools to help manage their emotions and behavior.

School counselors also evaluate a youth's abilities, personality and more to help set a foundation for success in the classroom and in life. A school counselor can make a referral to other resources if additional support is needed.

### Primary Ways that School Counselors/Social Workers Help:

- Listen to your child's concerns about social or academic problems
- Plan achievable goals and ways to reach them
- Act as a mediator between teachers, parents or other students
- Help students realize their potential and plan for the future
- Advise on drug and alcohol use
- Make referrals to psychologists or other mental health resources, if needed

## Pastoral Counseling

Communities of faith are known for providing people with support, encouragement and guidance. They can help people feel safe about opening up, discussing the real challenges they are facing and making positive changes.

Pastoral or faith-based counseling involves meeting privately with a priest, pastor, rabbi or other leader within the community. Typically, leaders like this are willing to meet with you whether you are a member of a faith community already or not. Pastoral counselors are not usually licensed mental health professionals; however, their education, training, compassion and other personal qualities can make them a great person to listen and provide help.

A number of Americans believe that spiritual faith is closely tied to their mental and emotional health. If your child or teen is already involved in a faith-based community, they may feel more comfortable speaking with a pastoral counselor.

This type of counselor tends to explore the core teachings of a religion and apply them in positive ways, such as how to relate to God, how to relate to others and how to enrich one's life. If your child's needs extend farther than what a pastoral counselor can provide, he or she can refer you to a licensed counselor.

### Primary Ways that Pastoral Counselors Help:

- Provide meaning and guidance in one's life
- Cultivate a sense of belonging, purpose or acceptance in a community
- Build self-esteem
- Help children or teens maintain focus on their goals
- Combine counseling with spiritual concepts



# For More Specific Mental Health Needs: Licensed Mental Health Professionals

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If your child's needs exceed what a school or pastoral counselor can help with, is outside of their expertise, or if your child has a mental health diagnosis or potential diagnosis, the help of a licensed mental health professional is necessary.

Mental and behavioral health challenges are complex. The exact cause of most mental illnesses is not known, although research shows that they emerge from a combination of psychological, biological/genetic and environmental factors.

Sometimes those environmental factors simply relate to stress and transitions in life. If your family is facing challenges due to relationships, work, finances or other aspects of life, there's an increased chance that your child is experiencing stress related to these challenges, too. Fortunately, licensed mental health professionals offer a potential solution to help children and families in times of need.

When deciding which type of professional is best suited to help your child, start with talking to your child's pediatrician or primary care physician. Your child's doctor can perform a physical exam and ask about their symptoms to begin investigating whether there are physical problems that can be causing the symptoms. They can help you decide what type of mental health professional is best for your child and determine if health insurance or other methods can be used to cover the cost of treatment.



# TYPES OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

## Licensed Counselor or Therapist

A licensed counselor or therapist is a person trained to listen without judgment and ask important questions. This process helps people discover solutions to the challenges they're experiencing and bring about positive change in their lives.

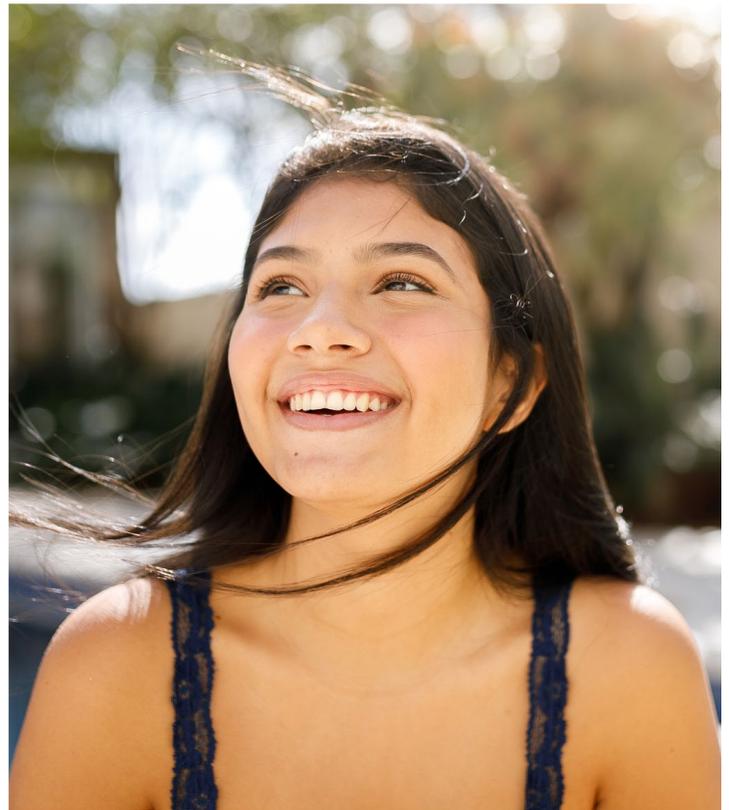
When you look at what's happening below the surface, you'll see that therapy is the process of treating a disorder and/or helping someone heal from past or current life experiences that are causing emotional pain. It's not just about stopping negative feelings or creating happy ones; it's about helping a person learn how to develop meaningful relationships and live a healthy, productive, satisfying life.

There are many kinds of counselors and therapists with different specialties and levels of education. They might provide individual therapy, couple or family therapy, or a combination. While the credential options vary by location, some of the most common types are:

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)
- Licensed Specialist Clinical Social Worker (LSCSW)
- Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT)

There are many more variations, specialties and credentialing options. There are also those who approach their work from a certain perspective, such as within the bounds of a religious faith.

Yet despite the variations, these mental health professionals are each trained in clinical therapy and licensed to diagnose and treat mental health disorders in individuals and family systems. However, they cannot prescribe medication for the treatment of those disorders.



## Psychologists

A licensed psychologist may or may not have a doctoral degree in psychology, which is the study of the human mind and how it affects behavior. Psychologists can do testing, make diagnoses, provide counseling and therapy, and provide treatment for mental health disorders. However, in most states, they are not able to prescribe medication.

Some psychologists may have training in specific forms of therapy like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or a specific type of intervention. It is common for a psychologist to work in partnership with a psychiatrist in treating a patient. The psychologist provides the therapy while the psychiatrist provides medication management and other medical treatment.

## Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are licensed medical doctors with medical and psychiatric training. They can diagnose mental health conditions as well as prescribe medications. Psychiatrists may also offer counseling and provide therapy. Some have special training in child and adolescent mental health or substance use disorders. Psychiatrists often focus on a client's medication management and work with another practitioner such as a therapist or psychologist who provides the therapy.

# Your Support Changes Lives



*There are  
many ways to  
get involved!*

## ADVOCATE

Help children and families in crisis by following our social media channels and subscribing to our blogs.

## VOLUNTEER

Give your time by sorting donations, providing childcare and so much more!

## DONATE

Make a gift online or donate items that families need. Sponsor an upcoming event.

## FOSTER OR ADOPT

Enrich your life in unimaginable ways! Learn more about becoming a foster or adoptive parent through KVC.

## GET MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Contact us to help you or someone in your life who is in need of behavioral or mental health treatment.

## JOIN OUR TEAM

Find meaning and purpose in your work and explore a career with KVC.

Visit [www.kvc.org](http://www.kvc.org) for details.

## IN-HOME THERAPY

Mental health treatment can come from a variety of professionals and it can also happen in a variety of settings. While it's common for people to travel to a professional's office to receive treatment, research shows that it is typically more effective for people to receive this type of help at home. This is especially true when therapy is for a family (or just a few members of the family) and the positive changes that need to happen relate to that home environment.

Why is home-based therapy more effective? The person or people receiving treatment tend to be more relaxed and can open up more easily. Also, the professional is able to make more observations about the person and family based on their natural environment — observations that may relate to challenges or solutions being discussed.

### **Other Benefits of In-Home Therapy:**

- Eliminates common barriers to mental health treatment such as childcare for children not participating in the therapy and transportation.
- More convenient access to care for the client; often occurs after school, in the evening or during the weekend.
- Duration of a therapy session is not time limited and is based on need of the recipients.
- Allows a therapist to learn more about a child or teen by working in their personal environment.



# For Needs When Safety is a Concern: Hospitalization or Residential Treatment

When a child or teen is coping with severe emotional, behavioral or mental health challenges, it may be necessary to seek higher levels of care. These types of care include inpatient acute hospitalization or residential treatment. When receiving these types of care, children reside in a treatment center where they receive 24-hour supervision to keep them safe. Common diagnoses for children or teens admitted into this spectrum of care include:

- Major depression
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Substance use disorders
- Oppositional defiant disorder
- Self-harm
- Thoughts of or attempted suicide



It's important to note that, when safely possible, home- and community-based care in a family environment is always preferred over treatment that requires a child to temporarily live in another location. These two higher levels of psychiatric treatment should be pursued when community-based options have been explored and are not successfully meeting the child's health and safety needs or if the child is in need of immediate stabilization due to a severe psychiatric concern.

## Inpatient Acute Hospitalization

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Inpatient acute treatment at a children's psychiatric hospital is necessary when a child or teen is exhibiting a severe psychiatric condition and needs immediate stabilization.

Often times, youth who need this type of treatment are at high risk of harming themselves or others and may be experiencing thoughts of suicide, severe depression, anxiety, anger, impacts of childhood trauma or other challenges. Youth receive round-the-clock care from a highly trained team of professionals. The goal is to stabilize the child, teach them coping skills, and help the family develop a continuing care treatment plan for when the child is ready to safely discharge from the hospital.

When arriving at an inpatient treatment center, medical professionals will conduct an initial assessment, talk to your family about the treatment process, and provide your child with a room. When able, a patient will begin attending individual and group therapy and other activities. In the first few days, a patient will meet with a team of multidisciplinary professionals including a therapist, psychiatrist, pediatrician or medical doctor, a nurse and a nutritionist (if needed).

## Residential Treatment

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Residential treatment centers are designed to provide children and teens with longer term, intensive therapy in a home-like environment. The best residential treatment programs emphasize a child's family being involved in the treatment process and help coordinate a successful return to the community as soon as safely possible.

Residential treatment settings are designed for youth who have experienced trauma or are struggling with behavioral or mental health challenges that require out-of-home care. It is best practice for these programs to be trauma-informed, meaning they understand, recognize and respond to the effects of all types of trauma. Through effective treatment, a therapeutic environment and 24-hour supervision and support, residential treatment programs help youth manage their mental or behavioral health needs, develop coping skills and create the path to a better future.

Often, residential treatment centers provide on-site schools, so an adolescent doesn't fall behind academically while receiving treatment. The youth will receive an initial assessment from medical professionals when arriving at a residential treatment facility. They will be shown the living environment and spaces where they will engage in group activities, which will become available to the youth when they are able to safely participate. In the first few days, the youth will meet with a team of multidisciplinary professionals to determine the best course of treatment, which may include a therapist, psychiatrist, pediatrician or medical doctor, a nurse and a nutritionist (if needed).

## **Benefits of Inpatient Hospitalization and Residential Treatment:**

- Professional healthcare workers are available 24 hours a day to help youth cope with difficult emotions and resolve any conflicts.
- Children and teens are encouraged to receive visits and phone calls from contacts approved by parents/guardians so that they remain engaged with their loved ones and support system.
- Treatment groups are provided, which may be centered on emotion regulation, education, behavior management, social skills and conflict resolution.
- Regular meetings with a therapist for individual, group and family therapy.
- Daily opportunities for recreation and exercise.
- Nurses are available to address any issues with medication or medical concerns.
- Regular meetings with treatment teams to discuss readiness for discharge and communicate discharge plans with children and families.
- School work can be brought to the treatment center and completed as needed, and school services may also be available on-site.



# Help Is Only a Call Away

There are many types of treatment available and finding the right one for your child or teen is important. If you have additional questions or would like to talk to someone about receiving services from KVC, contact your local KVC office. We offer a range of behavioral health services which are designed to promote healthy brain development, build resilience, and help our clients learn healthy skills to manage difficult emotions and move forward into a healthier and happier future.

In Kansas or Missouri, contact  
In Kentucky, contact  
In Nebraska, contact  
In West Virginia, contact

**Camber** at  
**KVC Kentucky** at  
**KVC Nebraska** at  
**KVC West Virginia** at

(913) 890-7468 or [cambermentalhealth.org](http://cambermentalhealth.org)  
(859) 254-1035 or [kvcky.org](http://kvcky.org)  
(402) 498-4700 or [kvcnebraska.org](http://kvcnebraska.org)  
(304) 347-9818 or [kvcwv.org](http://kvcwv.org)

If you're in another state, call us at **(913) 322-4900** or **[kvc.org](http://kvc.org)**

Visit our Resource Library for more free, downloadable guides and tools offering parenting tips, stories from real foster parents, education about mental health and suicide prevention, uplifting success stories, and more.

**[www.kvc.org/resourcelibrary](http://www.kvc.org/resourcelibrary)**



The  of  
our work is  
*helping people.*



**At KVC, we envision a world where every person is safe and connected to a strong family and a healthy community. Every day we work toward that goal by:**

- Giving youth the caring attention and clinical treatment they need to prevent suicide and other mental health crises
- Providing 24/7 support to children rescued from abuse and neglect, partnering with caring relatives and foster families so children can heal from trauma
- Stabilizing and strengthening families in crisis through in-home support
- Matching children with adoptive families to give them love, safety and a sense of belonging
- Working alongside complex agencies and systems, sharing best practices to achieve results
- **And so much more! Learn about us at [www.kvc.org](http://www.kvc.org)**