



Scripts For Parents

SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP

Teens and parents may have a lot of feelings when it comes to seeking professional help. Below are examples of language for how to address teen concerns, and why that language is important.

Why treatment works

Teen: "How can it help? Why waste my time?"

Parent: "Therapists have a lot of training and know which strategies work best to help people your age. They'll make sure this is going to work for you and what you need."

This is probably the biggest barrier to seeking help. Teens who are struggling may lack hope that anything will change. Hopelessness can be a temporary part of emotional distress. It may be hard for teens battling depression to see the light at the end of the tunnel, or for those with severe anxiety to feel like they will ever stop worrying.

Time invested will pay off

Teen: "There's no time for this."

Parent: "Time spent working with a therapist will pay off. It'll help you feel better, which will allow you to spend more time and energy on the things you love to do."

Calmness is key. A highly anxious teen may worry that the time invested in counseling will only make them fall behind in other areas of their lives. Their anxiety may make it difficult for them to hear your words. Parents' even-tempered calmness reinforces that their teens' mental well-being comes first.

Seeking treatment is an act of strength

Teen: "I can handle it. I don't need anybody else. I don't need anybody feeling sorry for me."

Parent: "You deserve to feel better. Therapists and counselors who work with young people do so because they care about and respect them. They are committed to making life better for them."

Make it clear that seeking help is an act of strength. Strong people know they are capable of feeling better, deserve to feel better, and will take steps to feel better. Reframe that help is not what they "need," but what they "deserve." It is genuinely brave and self-aware to be able to state, "I don't feel right, and I deserve to feel better."

Counseling is about guidance, not being "fixed"

Teen: "I'll figure it out. No one can understand what I've been through. How could they fix it?"

Parent: "Therapists will guide you to become stronger, make good decisions, get through challenges, and manage uncomfortable feelings by using skills you already have and by teaching you new ones."

Counselors are there to support, but the young person does the real work. Professionals do not give answers or solve problems. Rather they find each person's strengths and build upon them. Patients solve their problems with the support of professionals, family, and friends.



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Strong teens become strong adults

Teen: "I'm so angry all of the time!"

Parent: "I know you're angry, and I think you deserve to be happy. The sensitivity to your feelings you're showing me now tells me you're going to be a strong, caring adult."

Adolescence is a time of heightened emotions. The part of the brain that manages emotions is growing rapidly. Reinforce that the same sensitivity and depth of caring that troubles teens now is what positions them to have a full, rich life later. Reinforce that people who care make the best friends, life partners, colleagues, and parents.

Professionals honor privacy

Teen: "I don't want everybody to know my business."

Parent: "Therapists honor privacy and will not judge you. You decide what to tell them. I'm always here to support you and listen to anything you want to tell me. I'm happy you have another adult you can trust."

Another common roadblock to getting teens on board with seeing a professional stems from their desire for privacy. They might not realize that professionals honor privacy and work to serve without judgment. Make it clear that you will honor the private nature of that relationship.

Professionals support you as a parent; they do not replace you

Teen: "Why can't I just talk to you or my friends? My friends can relate to me better than any adult can."

Parent: "Therapists want to help. They won't be disappointed or angered by what you tell them. You can trust them to support you and don't replace the love and support of me or your friends."

A professional's role is to support through their specialized training. They won't be shocked, disappointed, hurt, or angry. They want to hear about teens' feelings. Relationships with friends and family are different; teens may worry about disappointing them or hurting their relationships. Professional guidance never replaces the love and support of family or friends.

Teens are not alone

Teen: "I'm just a freak."

Parent: "You are a person who is wise enough to know that you are struggling."

Underscore that we all struggle sometimes. Help teens understand the powerful combination of self-awareness and personal advocacy in being aware of what they are feeling, knowing when they need support, and being strong enough to reach out.

Professional support can strengthen relationships

Teen: "I've messed everything up."

Parent: "I love you. I know your behavior isn't a reflection of who you are -- just what you're going through. You deserve to feel better and I want to find someone who will help us accomplish that."

It is common to take stress out on the people you love because it feels safe to chance revealing our most uncomfortable thoughts and feelings in trusted relationships. It is not unusual for teens to push friends and family away precisely when they need the most support. Parents should make it clear that their love is unconditional, and they understand how teens' behavior reflects that they are going through something.