

**Author: Does the Child Need Counseling?**

**Authors:** [Nithyakala Karuppaswamy with Judith A. Myers-Walls, Ph.D., CFLE](#)

**Date:** Unknown

Some people think of childhood as an easy, carefree time. But children do have problems and feel stress. Times of special changes like divorce, a death in the family, or a move can be stressful for children. During times like that, children may have a range of feelings that are very confusing.

Children need time to adjust to major family changes. During these times, you and the parents should give as much support as possible to the children. Often support from you and the parents is enough to help the children adjust to the family event and move on. Some children may need a little more help, though. They may need the help of a professional counselor or therapist.

Getting professional help can support children in different ways. Counseling can help children get in touch with their feelings. Some children may have difficulty sharing their feelings, because they want to keep the family event a "secret." Other children can show their feelings in ways that cause problems by acting out, becoming violent, or becoming very quiet and withdrawn. When you see problems like this in childcare, ask the parents if they see them at home, too. Maybe you and the parent both feel that you are running out of ways to help. Counselors can help the children and parents deal with the family change.

Here are some signs that might show that the child might need professional help. If you see these signs, you could encourage the parents to contact a counselor or therapist. Some of these signs are fairly common; many children will do the things on the list at some point. But when the behaviors become extreme or last for a long time, you and the parent may decide that the child needs professional help.

***Signs that the child might need professional help*****• Long periods of sadness**

The child may seem to be sad for several days or weeks. Nothing helps the child feel better. You try to entertain or distract him, but nothing works. The child may cry over both little and big things and not be able to stop. Children might not talk about being sad; they show sadness mostly through their actions. That means they might get in trouble and break rules to show they are sad.

**• Living in the past**

The child may seem to think more about the past than the present. Many children will talk about the past when their family was together, when the loved one was still alive, or when the family used to live in the old place. Some children may complain that can't stop thinking about the death, their parents' divorce, or the move. That is normal right after the event. At some point children should be able to move on and talk about the present, though.

**• Withdrawn behavior**

Withdrawn children have little or no interest in playing or being with friends. They want to be by themselves instead of being with friends or adults. They want to stay alone all the time. They don't laugh, joke, or enjoy anything they are doing.

**• Problems saying good-bye to parents**

The child may not want to let a parent leave at the beginning of the day. Or she may ask about the parents many times as the day goes on. This is a problem if the child was used to saying good-bye before the problem occurred.

- **Cannot concentrate**

Some children may have a hard time getting things done. They may be distracted. Maybe they cannot settle on any play activities or jobs you give them. They may not follow instructions well. They may complain that they cannot concentrate.

- **Changes in daily habits**

Children may change what they normally do. Some children may wake up, but may not want to get up. Or they can start having problems going to sleep. They may have nightmares. They may eat much more or much less than before. Adults may have trouble predicting what the children are going to do or when they are going to do it.

- **Return to younger behavior**

A child may have been toilet-trained before, but now has accidents or needs diapers. Maybe a child will return to sucking his thumb or ask for a bottle. Some children may ask to be carried even though they can walk.

- **Feeling a sense of responsibility or guilt**

This is sometimes a problem with older school-age children. They may think a divorce or a death is their fault. They may believe that they are responsible for taking care of a parent or sibling. They may also feel caught in the middle of parents or other family members. They may say they have difficulty talking with a parent.

- **Feeling angry**

Some children may be angry all the time. They may often get into fights with other children in the childcare. They may take their anger out on other children, and sometimes on adults, by hitting, biting, and shouting. Parents may complain that the children often fight with their brothers or sisters at home.

- **Temper tantrums**

Some children might kick and scream more often than before. They might say no to everything you ask them to do. Every small problem seems to become huge.

- **Feeling anxious and worried**

Some children may worry a lot. They may worry about the parents when they are not at home. They may worry about their parents physically hurting each other or them. They may worry that another death will occur or that they will move again. They may find it very difficult to [separate](#) from one or both parents.

- **The parents cannot help the child**

You may notice that the parents are having a difficult time with their own feelings. A major change in the family affects all family members. Some parents may be dealing with many changes in work, schedule, or living situation. You may feel that the child needs more, but the parents cannot help at this point. You may suggest to the parents that they could get help

from someone else.

Many children do the things above at times. If the problems start suddenly after a divorce, death, or other stressful event, the child may need extra help. Getting help is important if:

- the signs are more extreme than you normally see in other children,
- they last day after day or week after week, or
- you or the parents have tried to work with the child, but the problems continue.

The parent will be responsible for getting help. You can suggest some places that they might look for help. Set a [special time to the talk](#) with the parents about this. You should have a list of [resources](#) to share with them. Let them make the final decisions.