When More Help is Needed

For children, the relationship they have with their parents is, and will most likely always be, the most important relationship they have throughout their childhood. As parents we provide for our child’s emotional needs in so many ways. This begins with the moment the child is conceived and/or with the moment we hold our child in our arms for the first time. We shape their life—more greatly than any other person. Since we know this is an important job so many of us take this job very personally. We strive hard to be the best parent we can be. We read books, we take classes, we talk to other parents—and we integrate this new information with how we were raised ourselves—trying to determine what to do the same and/or what to do differently.

Since parenting is such a personal job, and so many of us put so much of ourselves into it, I think it is hard to allow ourselves to acknowledge that we need help sometimes. We think we should be able to figure this out ourselves—or what worked for our parents should work for us (at least partly!). Yet, each person born to this world is unique—so our child may not need exactly what another child needed. This means how we were parented may not work for them, or how we parented our child’s sibling may not work for them. More and more research is showing that there are many different contributors to personality development—so our child’s "wiring" may be completely different from anything we’ve ever seen before, leaving us feeling we don’t understand our child at all. Or, our children may be exposed to situations that are out of our control—situations that have lasting emotional effects.

As parents I think most of us know when something is "not right" with our child. We can sense that they are anxious, or angry, or sad. I encourage all parents to pay attention to these feelings and not dismiss them as irrelevant. Staying "in tune" with our children's needs and responding to those needs is one of the best gifts we can give our children throughout their childhood. And as we try to figure out how to help our children it may be necessary (or best) to seek professional help. A professional psychotherapist who specializes in the treatment of children can help determine the right therapeutic interventions, so the child's current difficulties may have fewer lasting effects.

However, therapy is never a substitute for "good parenting." Children need a lot of help outside of therapy sessions. Having good parenting techniques in our tool box helps us be much more effective with our children. So, finding a therapist who works with the parents AND the child can help integrate specific therapeutic interventions into the home.

Some parents question whether or not certain behaviors are "normal" or "just a phase". Below is a list of behaviors that typically indicate a need for therapeutic interventions, especially if more than one of them is occurring at the same time. However, within each category there are varying degrees (mild, moderate, severe), so severe problems in these areas are much more concerning and will require more attention:

- Poor impulse control
- Aggression toward others (physical/verbal)
- Inappropriately demanding and clingy
- Deceitful (lying, conning) behavior
Sleep disturbances
Hyperactivity
Persistent nonsense questions, incessant chatter
Difficulty with novelty and change
Perceives self as victim (helpless)
Intense displays of anger (rages that cannot be soothed)
Frequently sad, depressed, hopeless
Extreme mood changes
Lack of eye contact
Cannot tolerate limits and external control
Lacks trust in others
Manipulative, controlling, bossy
Lack of remorse and conscience
Does not like to be touched and/or tactily defensive
Accident prone
Poor hygiene
Victimizes others (bully), seeks revenge
Blames others for own mistakes or problems
No stable peer relationships
Indiscriminately affectionate with strangers
Poor self-esteem
Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
Victimized by others
Difficulty with change
Learning disorders/Problems in school
Socially awkward
Lack of cause and effect thinking
Cruelty to animals
Inappropriate sexual conduct and attitudes
Pre-occupation or obsession with a certain type of object
Frequently defies rules (oppositional)
Abnormal eating habits
Destruction of property
Consistently irresponsible
Stealing
Unusually fearful
Grandiose sense of self-importance/entitlement
Poor organization and planning skills
Delayed moral development

If you are seeing severe behaviors in your child, or have many different behavior concerns, seek professional help. The sooner you can find effective solutions, the sooner you and your child will find your way back to happiness together.
Happy Parenting!