

# FOR PROFESSIONALS - MAKING A REFERRAL TO FAMILY THERAPY

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In your work supporting families, there may be times when you feel a family could benefit from some regular, ongoing family therapy or parenting support. There are a number of elements to consider when making the decision to recommend a family seek therapy. Therapy is an intense, ongoing process to develop self-awareness and new ways of looking at situations and skills to address problems. It requires that families have enough personal resources and life stability to engage in emotional, cognitive, spiritual and/or behavioural discussions and practices as well as the ability to attend regular appointments. It is important to consider the resource level of your clients as well as the timing of a

therapy referral. If a family is in the midst of a significant transition or responding to a very recent crisis, other crisis or case management services might be more beneficial than family therapy, for example, a parental break-up. During these types of systemic changes, there are natural emotional reactions and reorganization that take place over time which requires some support but it may not be the ideal time to engage in therapy. Once some level of stability has been achieved in the family system, therapy could help the family discuss how they handled the situation, current ongoing difficulties and how they might like to handle future difficult situations.

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Our mandate is to provide free family therapy for those who have difficulty accessing or affording such services on their own. In our experience, therapy works best when those receiving services have identified an issue they would like to be different within their family and that therapy might be helpful to them in addressing this issue. This is why we ask that families call us directly to receive services and only take self-referrals.

Should you think a family you work with would benefit from our services, we encourage you to have an open conversation about how family therapy might be helpful to them in addressing their concerns. It can be helpful to talk about the difficulties you see within the family in a systemic way as this helps to reduce feelings of blame parents might experience. For example, one could discuss how the best way to help children is to support their parents and emphasizing the positive influence they can have on their children. Seeking therapy can also be normalized by acknowledging that parenting is difficult for all of us. If parents are interested in family therapy, you can then provide them with information about our services, our contact information and any support needed to call us. For information on how to prepare families for therapy, please see the document called For Professionals: Preparing a Family for Therapy as well information in our Frequently Asked Questions section.

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The family member may call to book an intake appointment. The intake counsellor will collect basic information about the family and discuss information about the referral issue and relevant background information. Once it has been determined that the family meets the criteria of our **program's mandate** (a family with children under the age of 18 and limited access to other therapy service), the family is placed on our waitlist. Once a clinician has space in their caseload, they will call the family to set up a first appointment, usually with the parent(s)/guardian(s).

Should a family you support want more information about family therapy, feel free to provide them with information from our website (FAQs section) that describes what therapy involves and how it can help families. If they would like more information, encourage them to contact us with their questions about therapy and our program.

If you, as a professional, would like more information about our program or to consult with one of our clinicians regarding a potential referral, please contact our office and we would be happy to speak with you.

