

REFERRING TEENS

WHEN TO REFER

1. Any time a young person is contemplating suicide or harming herself or someone else, it's time to refer. A cutting habit could lead to more dangerous behavior (& it often does). So it's good to contact a mental-health professional in this circumstance. Suicidal thoughts are fairly common among adolescents---even so, they should be taken seriously. Generally, if in doubt over a student's quasi-suicidal behaviors, err on the side of safety. Kids use harmful behaviors like a megaphone- amplifying their cries for help.

2. Operate from a place of humility when you're assessing a teenager's problem- if it's over your head, admit it. If you don't know how to handle an issue brought to you by a teenager, or can't readily find an answer for him, refer them to a counselor.

3. I consider referring to a counselor if you don't have the time necessary to handle a student's problems. Counseling offers us a powerful opportunity to express Jesus' love to kids, but if you spend too large a share of your time doing this (counseling can mean a huge time commitment), other responsibilities will suffer.

4. Consider referring when your counseling has not resolved the problem. When you see a teens problems staying the same or getting worse, that's an indicator that it's time to seek alternate intervention. You can still provide support for Sally at youth activities and make sure they keep you updated, but they need a professional "guide" to lead them where you cannot.

WHERE TO REFER

You want to know that the counselor will be competent and will operate from a Christian perspective (or at least treat a teens faith with respect).

WHO DO WE HAVE HERE IN NEW ROCHELLE??? WESTCHESTER?

HOW TO REFER

Once you've decided to refer a teen to a counselor, talk with them honestly about your concerns and encourage them to enlist the help of their parents. Avoid telling them that they must get outside help, but rather try to help them come to this conclusion on their own (unless it's an emergency situation).

They might not want you to tell their parents but it's best to involve a young person's parents when you're making a referral. They'll likely be footing the bill, and everyone will be better off in an environment of open communication.

Tell the teen that you think they should seek additional help, and ask how they would like to tell their parents (this gives them a say in the process). Do they want you to accompany them when they tell them? Will they do it on their own? If they decides to tell them on their own, tell them that you'll follow up to make sure they're involved. Then let them know what to expect when they see a counselor so fear doesn't drive them from therapy.