

WHEN YOU KNOW THERAPY WOULD HELP YOUR CLIENT! How to Tactfully & Effectively Refer Clients to Therapy

Attorneys many times see people at their worst. Often very large stressors are impacting a person when they are involved in legal matters. Being in such a state can negatively impact a client's ability to collaborate as effectively as possible with their attorney. A client may be sabotaging their own case because they are not able to cooperate with the attorney, whether that is as simple as paying attention in meetings or producing documents needed, or more complex such as following through on advice the attorney gives as to how to behave throughout the case. Other times attorneys want their clients to present to therapy in order to help in a case. For example, engaging in parent coaching sessions or receiving treatment for drug or alcohol use prior to a court date. Then there are the clients who you just recognize need some extra support and guidance for their own emotional well-being. In all of these cases, psychologists are often asked by attorneys, **"How do I get my client to go to therapy?"**

One sure-fire way to make the suggestion easier if needed later is to **provide this information to all of your clients at the beginning of your work with them** as a possibility that may arise. Let all clients know during the intake process that: therapy is often used by clients involved in legal matters to manage their own stress and receive support during a difficult time; therapy can also result in them being more effectively able to collaborate with you; and that therapy can also be useful in some cases in which one wants to show the court the client is taking proactive positive steps. By giving this spiel to all clients early on you avoid sounding as though you have decided a client *in particular* needs *help*, plus it makes it easier to bring up any of these areas for assistance later if clients have already heard the information.

It can be tricky to suggest someone needs therapy because there still lingers the old-fashioned stigma against therapy being for 'crazy' people. So, an important step is to de-stigmatize the process. Talk about a psychologist you know, how helpful they have been to other clients and how they helped, rather than feeling you have to point out that there is something 'wrong' with your client. – **"Dr. Feel Good has worked with a number of my clients as they transition through divorce and I've received good reports on how she has helped them feel more in control over their lives." Or, "Dr. Feel Good has been very effective in helping clients manage their anxiety and depression and thus be able to effectively follow through on my advice." Or, "Seeing Dr. Feel Good for anger management will ultimately help your case."**

Normalize the situation for your client – **"It would be perfectly normal if you are feeling depressed after this accident. My clients often find it helpful to talk to someone about the changes they are experiencing due to an accident."**

Make a suggestion related to the need for 'support' versus 'help' for a 'problem.' **"Quitting drugs is something that is easier to do with support – maybe talking to someone who has dealt with others in this situation would be useful."**

You can also encourage someone to obtain 'coaching' from a psychologist if they balk at the idea of therapy. A Life Coach can help someone make changes in their life without the

assumption that there are 'problems' to 'solve,' and some psychologists do coaching in addition to therapy. A psychologist-as-coach can also then evaluate if the client should really be referred to therapy if the presenting problem is outside the range of what can be addressed under a coaching model; however, many people can be helped through coaching. **"I know a Life Coach who helps people deal with the transition of divorce and finds ways to make the most of the changes you are faced with."**

Have a few resources/handouts available for clients about how therapy or life coaching are useful and where to obtain services. Sometimes, just having information lying around your office can prompt the client into conversation. Click here for some examples:

<http://www.lepageassociates.com/pdf/HelpfulHints.pdf>

<http://www.lepageassociates.com/pdf/HelpfulResources.pdf>

<http://www.lepageassociates.com/pdf/PsychRoleDivorce.pdf>

<http://www.lepageassociates.com/lifecoaching.html>

Lastly, use a trusted psychologist you know as a sounding board. Call and ask if the referral seems appropriate, what to say, and how to approach an individual client. Visit our website for more information on therapy, evaluation, and life coaching services.