How Do I Know If I Need Therapy?

Most of us face struggles at some point in our lives. These struggles may include stress at work, difficulty with a romantic partner, or problems with a family member. Alternatively, struggles may include emotional symptoms such as depression or anxiety, behavioral problems such as having difficulty throwing useless items away or drinking alcohol too often, and cognitive symptoms such as repetitive upsetting thoughts or uncontrolled worry. Sometimes, life's struggles can be eased by taking better care of yourself, and perhaps talking about the issues with a supportive friend or family member.

But there may be times when these steps don't resolve the issue. When this happens, it makes sense to consider seeking the help of a qualified licensed psychologist. How do you know if therapy is needed?

Two general guidelines can be helpful when considering whether you or someone you love could benefit from therapy. First, is the problem distressing? And second, is it interfering with some aspect of life?

When thinking about *distress*, here are some issues to consider:

- Do you or someone close to you spend some amount of time every week thinking about the problem?
- Is the problem embarrassing, to the point that you want to hide from others?
- Over the past few months, has the problem reduced your quality of life?

When thinking about *interference*, some other issues may deserve consideration:

- Does the problem take up considerable time (e.g., more than an hour per day)?
- Have you curtailed your work or educational ambitions because of the problem?
- Are you re-arranging your lifestyle to accommodate the problem?

A 'yes' response to any of these questions suggests that you might wish to consider seeking professional help. Remember that sometimes a problem might be less upsetting to you than it is to the people around you. This does not automatically mean that you are in the know and your friends or family are over-reacting to you. Rather, this situation suggests that you may wish to think about why the people who care about you are upset.

Clearly, the decision to enter into therapy is a very personal one. Numerous advances have been made in the treatment of psychological disorders in the past decade and many therapies have been shown scientifically to be helpful. As you think about whether therapy might be helpful to you, remember that many psychological problems have been shown to be treatable using short-term therapy approaches.

Learning more about different approaches to therapy might also help you to discern if one of them sounds like a good fit with your personality and approach to life. Given the range of therapeutic options that are available, you don't need to continue to struggle with a problem that is upsetting and/or getting in the way of other parts of your life. Help is available.