

Is This Normal?

10 Telltale Signs that Your Child Needs Professional Help

by  Dr. Leesha



Over the 10+ years I have been treating children and adolescents, the question almost every parent wants answered is, **“Is this normal?”** Parenting is incredibly hard work, and our children don’t come with an instruction manual. It’s hard to know if your child’s frequent outbursts or your teenager’s Instagram post showing a sad face emoji and the words “I hate my life” is a cause for worry or normal childhood development. To help answer these questions, I have devised a list of 10 *telltale signs that should prompt your attention and further evaluation*.

These signs are grouped into 3 major categories:

- > **Change From Baseline**
- > **Reckless Behavior**
- > **DANGER!**

CHANGE FROM BASELINE

- 1 Decline in Grades** — Your once A/B student is now failing to turn in assignments, no longer studies for tests, misses project deadlines, brings home low grades.
- 2 Change in Friends** — Fewer friends/lost friends; new friends different from their usual peer group (now hanging out with a rough crowd); has lost friends.
- 3 Mood Changes** — More withdrawn and isolative; sad and crying spells; more irritable and angry and often with little provocation.



RECKLESS BEHAVIOR

- 4 Staying Out Late / Missing Curfew** — No longer obeys established rules; rules are instead treated like suggestions; returns home well past curfew without calling or texting.
- 5 Suspicion of Drug Use** — Drug paraphernalia; atypical smells emanating from their bedroom; starts using room sprays to mask odors; has new friends who are known to use drugs and alcohol.
- 6 Sexting, or posting sexually explicit images.**
- 7 Questionable Content on Social Media Sites** — Posts discuss suicide or self-injurious behavior, drug and alcohol use; comments about being bullied.

DANGER!

- 8 Self-injurious Behavior / Suicidal Threats** — Wears long sleeve shirts during the summer; find razor blades; see fresh cuts or healing scars; bandages on her forearms.
- 9 Physically Aggressive Behavior** — Posturing as if to hit you; throwing objects or breaking things when angry; verbally aggressive; explosive anger outbursts; you fear for your safety.
- 10 Feedback** — From other parents or peers, concerns raised by teachers, or involvement of the legal system.



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