

# OPEN LETTER TO A THERAPIST

from a mom of a child with RAD

Dear Therapist,

I am desperate for your help. I apologize ahead of time if I seem angry and defensive. I'm just burnt out and afraid you won't understand. My son is completely out of control and nothing works.

I've tried to get help before from therapists and teachers, even police officers, but no one understands. They all think I'm exaggerating, or maybe even lying. My own mother says, "He's just a kid," and can't understand what I'm dealing with is way beyond normal, way beyond safe, and way beyond what I can handle. My son went through trauma at a young age and has been diagnosed with reactive attachment disorder.

I'm not exaggerating when I say my son screams for hours. He's torn his bedroom door off the hinges and put holes in his walls. His siblings are afraid of him. Sometimes I'm afraid he'll burn down the house when I'm asleep.

When you meet my son, he'll look like a very different child than he is with me. You'll think I'm overreacting. I'm not. You see, my son is an expert at triangulating the adults around him. Due to his early trauma, he manages his surroundings and the people in them to feel safe. In doing so, he's good at making everyone think I'm mean and crazy. Sometimes I start to believe it too.

I have a secret I should probably share with you—it's true that I'm not perfect. I'm very aware of that fact. I've screamed at my son and lately I'm always angry and frustrated. I'm afraid to tell you this because you'll think I'm a bad mom and blame me for everything. Most people blame me for my son's problems. Yet, I'm the one person whose life has been turned inside out and upside down to try to help him.

I've turned into an unhappy, negative, impatient person whom I don't even recognize anymore. Sometimes I wonder if I have post-traumatic stress disorder, but feel stupid suggesting that dealing with a child could cause PTSD. It would be helpful for you to encourage me to get some therapy for myself.

Even though I'm not a perfect mom, I'm still a good mom trying my best. Before we get started, here's what you need to know (because my son will tell you otherwise):

- I feed my son three meals a day, plus snacks.
- I don't hurt my son.

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- I'm not the one who rips up his homework and throws it away.
- He locks himself in the closet under the stairs. I don't and wouldn't ever do that to him.
- Our house isn't haunted, he's not best friends with Justin Bieber, and he's not going to live with his birth mom next week.

My son will tell you things in individual therapy that will take up all of our time to untangle.

In the meantime, we'll be distracted from working on the really serious problems for which we need your help. This is why I'm going to insist on being present during all therapy sessions. Please understand it's not because I have something to hide. I just want to keep things from getting worse than they already are.

Typical parenting strategies like sticker reward charts don't work for my son. We've already tried all sorts of behavior modification strategies. I can't ignore my son's negative behavior either. I can't just watch him hurt himself, his siblings, or destroy everything we own.

Please understand, our family is in crisis.

This is an emergency. We need help and we need it fast. That play therapy you do in the sand...I don't know, maybe it works for some kids—but not for him. I'm not trying to be unreasonable; I just know what doesn't work. If you don't have experience working with trauma-exposed kids, please refer us to someone who does. I understand this is a very specific and serious issue that not all therapists have expertise in.

I'm willing to do whatever it takes to help my son heal and to fix our family. Please help us.

Sincerely,

A mom of a child with RAD