

A GUIDE TO PREPARING AND SUPPORTING YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD THROUGH COUNSELLING THERAPY



PART 1; CONSIDERING SEEKING COUNSELLING SUPPORT FOR YOUR CHILD

IS COUNSELLING THE RIGHT THING FOR MY CHILD?

- Have you discussed the issues with the school to eliminate any learning difficulties, bullying etc, or the GP for any medical problems?
- Have you sought parenting support before sending your child to therapy?
- Be truthful as a family as to where the problem may lie. It is paramount that if there are issues within family dynamics that the child is not made the scapegoat for this by sending them to therapy to fix the problem. It may mean one of the parents requires help or that family therapy is required if there is a general breakdown.
- Question if the child really has a problem or are they just not behaving how you would expect or want them to? Are they feeling pressure to behave a certain way in which they cannot achieve?

Whilst your child may be presenting difficult behaviours and feelings it is important to firstly consider whether the problem really lies with them or are they just the symptom of something else within their environment? This is important because sending a child to therapy can infer all sorts of negative things that could potentially make the child's behaviours and feelings worse.

Children are reactive to their environment and they learn by and adapt their behaviours to what is around them. If these behaviours are not favourable, then this suggests the environment does not work for them. Whilst there are certain adaptations a child developmentally needs to make we cannot expect the child to adapt if the environment is below ideal.

Sending your child to therapy could infer....

- That you cannot cope with them
- That they are a 'problem child'
- That they must be 'bad'
- There is something 'wrong' with them.

But also.....

- That they have been listened to when they have asked for help.
- That they are worthy of being helped.

AM I PREPARED FOR MY CHILD TO BE IN THERAPY?

Sending your child to therapy may initially feel like a relief that they are finally getting the help they need. However, once the process starts all sorts of things can occur, emerge or change, not just for your child. Everybody around the child may be impacted by the experience and this is important to

- Be prepared for your child to form a close relationship with another adult
- Be prepared to accept that your child may tell the counsellor things they have not told you and may never will (I do not provide any reports detailing sessions).
- Be prepared that your child may present you with confronting issues that you may have to face about yourself. Rather than reject your child's need to express themselves be prepared that you may need to seek counselling for what this brings up for you.
- Consider the financial commitment and your limitations (minimum 6 sessions).
(See below for further details on all these points)

consider beforehand as to whether you feel ready to manage this.

HOW DO I KNOW IF THERAPY IS WHAT MY CHILD NEEDS?

Therapy can be a daunting process for a young person and as mentioned above, it can infer a lot of negative things for your child if it is not right for them. It can also be a huge relief for them to be getting the right help. You know your child best.

Reasons for considering counselling

- There has been a sudden change in their behaviour
- There has been a specific incident that they don't appear to have resolved.
- They have expressed difficulties and asked for help

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD BEFORE CONSIDERING THERAPY?

- 🌈 Firstly, don't be worried you are not qualified to deal with bigger issues. You are their parent and they should get the most comfort from you.
- 🌈 Be available for them to talk to you openly.
- 🌈 Allow them to feel free to talk without showing undue worry or concern. It will be containing for them to see you can handle their feelings.
- 🌈 Don't be scared by some of things they say or do, they may be experimenting to gauge and learn how people react.
- 🌈 Respect and acknowledge what they have told you but set boundaries and teach them what is an appropriate way to express their feelings.
- 🌈 If they continue to express distress/anger/anxiety etc, then ask them if they feel they need some help.
- 🌈 Whilst offering advice may be the solution it can also be disempowering if it does not come from a place of complete understanding. Accept that what works for you may not work for your child. So ask them what they may need from you to help them.
"You have told me you are unhappy/anxious/angry and need help. Sometimes parents don't always know how best to help....is there anything you want from me that will help?"
- 🌈 Your child may not know what they need and so reassure them that this is ok.
"I know sometimes you may feel lots of things inside but not have the words to say what they are all about."
- 🌈 This will help them to feel like you understand their struggle.

If all of the above factors have been considered and tried and your child still presents with difficulties then this may be the point to consider therapy.

PART 2; PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR THERAPY

HOW DO I SUGGEST THERAPY TO MY CHILD?

"I know somebody who may be able to help you with the way you feel, maybe to work out why you feel the way you do and how I then might be able to help you."

Be honest with them

- 🌈 Don't play therapy down by saying it's a place to play and have fun and to make a new friend. This will be very confusing for them as to why they are there.
- 🌈 Tell them that it is a safe place just for them to express themselves without worry about how others may react.
- 🌈 Tell them that they don't have to worry about what to say as sometimes feelings can be expressed through play or art and that I will support them with this.

HOW WILL MY CHILD'S THERAPY WORK?

When considering Spectrum for your child's counselling there are several factors in terms of the way I work. I am fundamentally guided by the BPS Code of Ethics, by chosen theoretical orientations and by professional experience. As mentioned at the start, it is important the parents are aware of these factors and consider their own capacity to work with them before therapy begins. Whilst other therapists may work slightly differently we all create a structure we feel most comfortable working with.

CORE PRINCIPLES

- **Confidentiality**
- **Transparency –**
 - All discussions with parents are disclosed to the child.
- **Child-Centered-**
 - I work with their agenda, not the parents.
 - I work at their pace
 - Child has full autonomy about being in the session or leaving.
 - Child has full autonomy over what they do in the room

Financial commitment

Through experience I now initially ask for a minimum of 6 sessions commitment, although there could be many more. This enables us to establish a trusting relationship, to do some therapeutic work and potentially end effectively. Some good work can be done in this time but it is important for us to know beforehand if this needs to be in place. It can be detrimental for the child if they have to be withdrawn from counselling prematurely without preparation.

Ideally you will be able to fund for us to continue working together until it is felt between all of us that sufficient progress has been made, or the child chooses to withdraw. Throughout the process, I will engage the child in discussions about their progress and thoughts about continuing.

Confidentiality.

Confidentiality is a fundamental principle of all counselling, regardless of age. It enables a client to feel they can say everything they need to without concern about the impact it may have on themselves or others.

I do not produce any written reports of sessions for the parents and do not feedback what happens in each session.

Once I have obtained the relevant information from the parents beforehand there will be minimal contact between us until leading up to session 6.

Whilst your child may be very young and they may not understand cognitively or consciously what confidentiality means, I have witnessed first-hand the impact when it is breached and can cause a breakdown in the process. Whilst I respect and appreciate the needs of the parents to know what is happening with their child so they can help them, counselling can only work if they feel safe enough to explore their world knowing it won't be shared.

Invariably with very young children little of relevance is said but an unconscious process is explored through play and art that enables them to find their voice at home. With older children, they have the capacity to consider what and why they are withholding from parents. If something significant is said I will work with the child to ascertain why they can't tell you and help facilitate a way that they can, with their consent. Breaching confidentiality can only be done if I believe your child is at risk of serious harm or will harm another person. If this were the case, there are clear Child protection procedures I will go through.

Child-centred

Whilst I listen to the concerns and needs of the parents once I start working with the child it is their agenda that I follow. Whilst a particular behaviour may concern the parents it may not concern the child, but something else may concern them. I work with what the child brings as their problem.

Once therapy starts the therapy room is your child's space only and it is their time. If you would like to discuss anything with me, please do so outside of the session time via email. Do not expect to turn up and talk to me in their time and space and do not have conversations with me over them in the outside area.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD THROUGH THERAPY?

Leading up to session 6 I will ask for some feedback from the parents as to whether they have seen any changes in their child, good or bad. Where possible I will do this via email as it keeps things simple and maintains a transparency for the child to see what has been said if they require it.

I will offer a general feedback as to whether I feel your child is benefiting from counselling and any recommendations about continuing or ending. From then on, we will agree points in which we will re-assess the situation, but always with the child at the centre of the decision.

It is important that endings are done in relation to the child's needs and process, not the parents. Parents removing their child prematurely has the potential to create future problems between you and your child because of power and control issues.

Supporting the process of therapy

Any changes in behaviour suggest something is working but if they remain in a difficult place it is important to continue through this so your child can negotiate their way out of it. It is common to see new behaviours or worsened behaviours whilst they expose themselves in the process. For example they may become more tearful having initially come as angry. This means we are breaking through to the core of the problem. They may feel more vulnerable, or more confident to find and express their voice. It is important to understand this is part of the process and rather than reprimanding them they need more positive support through these times as well as clear and positive boundaries.

-  Don't force them to tell you about the session but do make yourself available to them if they wish to talk.
-  Ensure they can 'feel' you are available to them without pressure. This means putting away the phones and laptops. They may just need some time to 'be' with you, knowing your focus is on them.
-  Be as empathic as possible with where your child may be during this process.
-  Maintain clear boundaries as they negotiate new behaviours to make them feel safe.
-  Persevere with any difficult changes that have occurred until they have worked them through.
-  Provide some free time together where normal social rules and parental guidance does not apply. Listen to what it is they are saying or doing without fear or judgement.
-  Be patient, the child needs to work at their pace and not feel pressured to 'fix' themselves quickly because of pressure from parents.

It is important to stress that I am not a parent advisor or family therapist and cannot offer advice on how to handle your child's behaviour at any point of the process. If you feel you need this extra support there are other agencies in which you can contact.