

CATALYST PSYCHOLOGY

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU BRING YOUR CHILD OR TEEN TO THERAPY

Ethics | Guidelines | information

Many parents or guardians are not sure what to expect when they bring their children or teenagers to psychological therapy. Here's some information to help you and help your young person through the process.

1. Have a clear discussion about why they are seeing a psychologist.

Some children ask to come to therapy. At other times, teachers and parents make the decision for them. We understand this and have experience in managing it. However, it is best you have a few simple, clear discussions beforehand. Explain briefly why the decision has been taken to see a psychologist. Examples might be, "Your teachers think it could help with your learning", "I'm concerned you seem too anxious", "The arguments in the family are getting too stressful for us all".

2. Guidance about privacy of information.

All psychologists are required to keep information about their clients private and confidential. This is to ensure our clients talk openly with the psychologist and can be helped fully. Your psychologist will respect the privacy of your young person as much as possible. Often parents of young children are kept fully informed. However, young people generally have increasing right to privacy as they near 18 years of age. This may mean that not everything your teenager discusses with their psychologist will be relayed to you. We will routinely discuss and negotiate what



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information will be passed to parents. We also discuss what information will be passed to schools or other organisations with the young person and the parent or guardian.

This requirement to keep information private means that information you discuss alone with the psychologist will be treated confidentially and sensitively too.

3. Duty of care.

All psychologists are required to act to ensure the wellbeing and safety of their client. When a child or young person is the client, the psychologist must act to enhance the wellbeing of that young person. This could mean that they will decide what information to pass on to a parent and how to treat the young person. The wishes of the client, and the parent, are respected as far as possible while maintaining the client's wellbeing. We have a duty to ensure safety, so any suspected risk of harm or suspected abuse will be acted on by the psychologist. Parents or guardians will be informed where it is safe for the young person to do so.

4. Keep up clear, transparent communication with your psychologist.

While we need to keep certain information private, it is usually best if the young person, their parents and the psychologist can all talk openly and transparently with each other. If you're concerned about something it is best the young person know this and knows you will share it with the psychologist. Speak to the psychologist alone first if you're not sure about this or not sure how to say it.

We endeavor to keep you up to date about your child or teen's progress and therapy. You're very welcome to speak to the psychologist if you have a concern, a question, would like strategies, or would like an update. How this is done varies. The psychologist may allocate part of a session for these discussions or send you an email. Speak to your psychologist about how to structure this.

5. When parents don't live together.

Stay involved

It's really important to stay involved in the young person's therapy. Young people aren't always aware of their feelings or actions. And they generally need help to change. So their psychologist will need information from you and your active involvement in therapy. The psychologist may ask you to change some things or support the young person to do tasks outside of therapy. Sometimes young people like to de-brief or discuss things with you before or after appointments too.

Ask the psychologist if you're needed that session before you go do some shopping. Provide a private space for telehealth sessions but be around. Be aware your young person may want to chat before or after sessions and ask how the session went.

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It's generally best if both parents are aware the young person is attending psychological therapy and give their consent. It is also usually best if both parents are involved in the therapy to some degree. However, medical and allied health professionals only need consent from one legal guardian to treat a child or young person. When we include parents or guardians, we also need to respect the wishes of the young person as far as possible and ensure we are acting to maximise the young person's wellbeing. Sometimes this may mean information is not passed to both parents.

We may gather information about both households to effectively treat the young person. However, we are required to ensure this information remains private to the respective parent or household.

Speak to the psychologist about when and how to include both parents if you think there may be issues with this.

6. Kids play

Finally, remember that kids play to connect to others and learn. Sometimes even teens need some play, but often a bit of banter helps them feel comfortable. So, your psychologist may spend time 'playing' with kids and teens in the session. This is done deliberately and is helpful for their overall treatment.

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