



Catholic Community Services of York Region Counselling Services

SOME THINGS FOR PARENTS TO KNOW ABOUT COUNSELLING FOR A CHILD (UP TO 16)

When a child or teen is referred to us for counseling, we typically work with both the child and the family. Even more than adults, they need the understanding and support of those around them to achieve their goals. Parents are usually asked to meet with the counselor first, without the child present. In other sessions we may meet with the child alone, with the parents only, with one parent and child, all the children together, or even with the whole family, depending on what makes the most sense.

When we meet with a child alone we know it is important for parents to get feedback. Please remember that children often need to be allowed to decide how and when they share it. Feedback may be after every session, or every few sessions. It may be from the child, or from the counselor, or both.

Most of the time children can only make changes when the adults around them lead the way. Parents are often asked to consider changes in the home and in their parenting, as part of the overall plan for the child.

Counseling is a process that requires commitment from a child, especially to open up to a new adult. So we ask parents to make a commitment to let children complete their counselling. When parents feel that counseling is not achieving the changes they hoped for, they are asked to not stop the counseling, but instead to discuss their concerns with the counselor.

Please note that we do not provide formal assessments, or diagnoses, of the child.

SEPARATED PARENTS

Initial and ongoing contact with both parents is normally required, even if the referring parent has sole custody. This helps us to understand the child better, increases opportunities to get support for the child's goals, and helps to avoid misunderstandings about the purposes of the counseling. It also means that children don't have to keep their counseling a secret from the non-custodial parent.

As counseling proceeds, reasonable access to verbal updates on the scope and progress of counseling will be available to either or both parents, at the counsellor's discretion.

PARENTS IN CONFLICT, OR POST-SEPARATION CONFLICT

When parents are in conflict, it almost always has a negative impact on children. One of the most important tasks for parents is to reduce the conflict, or the impact of the conflict on the child, to the best of their ability. We will typically seek a commitment to conflict reduction as part of the overall plan for the child. In some cases counseling that includes the child will not begin until the parental conflict has been reduced.

PARENTS IN ONGOING, SERIOUS, CONFLICT

Parents sometimes seek counseling for a child when there are serious, ongoing, disputes about custody, or access to the child, or allegations of “parental alienation”, or where a parent seeks “reunification” with an estranged child against the wishes of the other parent. Frequently these disputes involve family court. This is sometimes referred to as “high conflict” separation or divorce. Parents need to know that, under these conditions, the results that can be achieved in counseling are limited. Counseling may be deferred until legal matters are resolved. We will usually seek access to, and involvement by, both parents, before beginning counseling, and this can take time. We urge parents to avoid excessive use of legal action, especially while the counseling is ongoing.

As family counselors, we act, and recommend actions, in the best interests of the child and family as we see them, in the short term or beyond. We recognize that parent-child relationships are typically life long, and we caution against closing the door on the future potential of even very difficult relationships, except as a last resort.

As above, reasonable access to verbal updates on the scope and progress of counseling will be available to either or both parents, at the counsellor’s discretion. When it is appropriate to provide written information on the progress of counseling it will be done in the form of a letter, written to the parent making the request, for which there is a fee. A copy may be shared with the other parent, or not shared, at the discretion of CCSYR. As with any counselling, it is our strong preference that counselling records not be sought for court, and we urge caution in the use of these records for such purposes.

PLEASE NOTE:

We do not assess or treat “parental alienation”, nor provide “reunification therapy”. We will not offer counseling when the primary purpose appears to be for one parent to gain an advantage over the other. We cannot shorten the wait time for counseling to meet the conditions of a court order. We do not write “parenting capacity assessments” or other reports for court purposes. The sliding scale fee may not apply in high conflict cases.

Please call if you have any questions.