

Supporting a child through counselling

Counselling children and young people

- Therapy with children and adolescents can be very different compared to traditional adult therapy.
- Adults may be able to describe in words and phrases their experiences of the world fully, whilst children and young people to a lesser extent, cannot. The world an adult responds to is different from that of a child or young person.
- Therefore, different therapeutic approaches may be required when working with children and young people.

Approaches that may be used during therapy

- For children and young people play and creative approaches can provide them with an easier way to express themselves, since children are more naturally artistic and creative.
- Using play helps them to distance themselves and feel control over difficult experiences and feelings.
- A question and answer type format can be daunting and intimidating for a child, when they have to try and explain themselves, especially if they have limited vocabulary.
- We may also draw from other approaches such as Solution-focused, CBT and psycho-educational.

Presenting issues

- Children may be offered counselling for many different reasons; they may be struggling to deal with their feelings, thoughts, emotions. Often at the point of entering counselling these feelings and emotions have overflowed.
- Sometimes it may be the adults suggestion that the child or young person accesses counselling support.
- It's important to consider and validate the feelings that might arise for a child or young person when someone suggests counselling, or when they go to a counselling sessions.

Offering counselling

- Many will assume that the counsellor will take charge like other adults but equal power in a counselling relationship is vital if we are to enable young people to feel empowered and build self-esteem and resilience.
- Confidentiality – we will not share without the child's or young person's consent what they have done or spoken about in therapy.
- There are limits to confidentiality which we explore before sessions begin. An example includes if we felt the young person was in serious danger or at risk of harm.
- We provide a relationship offering the young person empathy, no judgement, honesty and respect.

Use of different media

- The selection of different media will be based on the age and personal choice for the child.
- Some examples include:
 - Sand pit
 - Games
 - Play
 - Miniatures
 - Puppets
 - Feelings Jars
 - Art



BARNARDO'S

Supporting a child through counselling

During counselling

- When any child and young person has experienced a trauma or significant event in their lives, the event can get buried into their subconscious, where it can affect them in the future.
- These types of feelings are not easy for children and young people to talk about, especially when there are deep-rooted emotions. Through a child centred approach, suppressed emotions can be brought to the surface, be understood and re-organised into their experience, relieving anxiety and tension.
- When we re-experience these feelings everyone's 'self' may respond differently – when recognising past feelings.
- This can cause behaviours to escalate before things gets better.

What feelings may arise for a child or young person?

There may be times when a child seems more upset following a counselling session, and this may be because they have been talking about painful feelings. However, children may seem more relaxed quite soon after a few sessions, as they have been able to let go of some painful, often confusing feelings.

These feelings may include:

- Sadness • Anger • Frustration • Fear • Hurt
- Relief • Happiness • Acceptance • Fun.

Will the counsellor talk to me?

- It is natural that you will want to know how your child or young persons getting on in their counselling and if you have any concerns please raise them with us.
- We will offer you reviews. This will be with a child or young persons consent and knowledge and not discuss specifics, but broadly how things are going and about working together on possible strategies. These are also an opportunity to discuss on-going support for yourselves.
- It is important to remember that the counsellor will have agreed to a confidential relationship and are ethically bound to this, unless safeguarding issues arise and a child or young person is at serious risk.

How to help your child and young person when they are receiving counselling

- Encourage your child and young person to attend sessions and enable a child and young person to access sessions, e.g. allocating that time and not shifting sessions, try to avoid cancelling sessions.
- Talk openly and answer any questions they may have. Explain counselling is a safe space.
- Let your child and young person know it's perfectly normal to seek help sometimes.
- Give them space and time after sessions, or that evening if they need it.
- Offer them time to talk if they wish to.
- Don't immediately ask the child and young person to evaluate the session.
- Accept and validate feelings which may come up, such as sadness, anger. Help them understand that there are no 'bad' emotions and the difference between emotions and behaviours.
- Understand that it's a process and changes take time. Be patient and supportive throughout the process.
- Respect their confidentiality. The counselling relationship is very private and personal, and each child and young person will respond differently. Some children and young people may wish to talk about their sessions, whilst others, especially teenagers may wish to keep the content of the session to themselves. It is important to be guided by the child and young person, and to respect these individual differences. Showing sensitivity to their distress, whilst also respecting their right to privacy is a difficult but important balance to achieve.
- Celebrate their progress along the way.
- Create a consistent routine around the counselling sessions.

'Enabling a child or young person to tell their story in an environment where the child and young person is accepted, safe, with understanding and without judgement, is a vital part of the empowerment process.'

'When we feel truly heard we can begin to listen to ourselves much better, feelings are more fully accepted in our selves.'

BARNARDO'S