

ASK Counseling and Consulting Parent/Caregiver Handout

Parents and/or Caregiver,

Thank you for entrusting me with your child's mental health care. Everyone that comes through my doors for the first time is typically apprehensive, not knowing what to expect. Kids and parents alike experience this apprehension. This handout will explain what the therapy process is like with me. I hope this gives more clarity on the therapy process, and eases any apprehension.

I explain therapy/counseling to children in an age appropriate way. I explain my role as a therapist. I tell kids that I am a "helper" for kids. I explain there are all kinds of community helpers such as doctors, police officers, teachers, firefighters, etc. I explain that helpers for kids help keep kids safe, and it is my job to help them work through big feelings and life changes. I explain confidentiality in an age appropriate way, and tell them that everything said in my office, stays in my office, unless they were in danger. I explain to kids that I do keep parents informed of what we work on, but I don't tell parents every detail of the things they discuss, unless it is something involving their safety or pertains to their treatment. At the end of sessions, we fill parents in on what they are working on.

Some topics I work with almost every kid on is: expressing and identifying feelings in a healthy way, communication, education on their particular diagnosis if they have one, safety topics regularly reinforced such as stranger/body safety, self-esteem, healthy age appropriate coping skills, what feelings look like in our bodies, and identifying connections between thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

One of the comments I hear from parents is: "What do you actually *do* with my child? It looks like all you do is play!" All therapy I utilize with children is evidence-based, scientifically sound and has been researched extensively and found to be reliable and effective forms of therapy for children. I am trained in Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Play therapy, Sand tray therapy, and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) with a focus on use with children. All of these are endorsed by organizations such as World Health Organization as being reliable forms of therapy for children. I like to let parents know what doing these therapies look like with kids, so you understand the process.

Something else parents typically say is "I want you to talk with my child about.." No matter the age, we do a lot of talking in therapy, of course, but I also like to remind parents that ***a child's language is play***. Play is creative and expressive. The right hemisphere of the brain is the creative and emotional part of the brain. The left hemisphere of the brain is the logical and analytical side of the brain, and is the side where verbal communication comes from. The left hemisphere in children is still developing, and in some cases of trauma and PTSD, the Broca's

area of the brain in the left hemisphere where verbal communication occurs, can be physically damaged and underdeveloped. Because of this, a child's primary way of communication and expression occurs on the right hemisphere. Therefore, therapies that are more "right-brained" focused are more effective with children.

Sandtray therapy is a right brained approach that freely allows children to express and process thoughts and feelings. In Sandtray therapy, a child is presented with lots of different types of "miniatures." Miniatures are not just toys, but are carefully thought out objects that children can choose from to create "worlds" in the sand. Sometimes, children will be directed to create specific sandtrays such creating their family, creating a world all about them, creating a world about their current struggle, etc. Play therapy utilizes specific therapeutic games, art, toys, etc. to allow a child to express and process, or work on a particular topic/skill.

When we have a memory or situation that bothers us and causes us emotional distress, it means it is being stored in the right side of the brain (the emotional side). Typically, when we sleep, during REM when our eyes move back and forth is when we are dreaming. REM sleep/dreaming is the brains natural process to file away memories from the day into long term memory storage. When this happens, the memories no longer bother us. However, if something is just too big for our brains to "digest," and we continue to be emotional or effected by a situation, it means that it just hasn't been properly processed in the brain yet. This is very common and can occur with "Big T Trauma" (like being in a car wreck) and "little T traumas" (getting rejected by a friend at school or going through a life transition). EMDR therapy is a therapy that utilizes "Bilateral Stimulation" such as eye movement or bilateral tapping that will help the brain properly store/process negative memories. Bilateral stimulation can also be used to enhance positive beliefs and feelings. For kids, I use a paint brush typically for bilateral stimulation.

When starting therapy, you should expect to see behavior improvements within 3-4 weeks. If your child has trauma and is going through EMDR therapy, you may expect to see some behavior changes along the way, and you can expect some changes in sleep/dreaming. These changes are typically improvements, although if a child is still in a traumatic situation (going through custody changes, being put in the middle of family conflict, etc), the changes are typically slower.

I hope this explains the science behind the therapies and why we do what we do in therapy. My goal is to use the tools that are scientifically proven to work to help your children reach their goals, and, we also get to have fun reaching those goals! If you ever have any questions or concerns, please feel free to discuss with me.