



FREE TO FEEL THERAPEUTIC SERVICES, PLLC

WHAT IS “CHILD THERAPY”?

Therapy can be effective for children of all ages. What therapy looks like might change based on the age, development, and strengths an individual child has. Overall, here are some things to expect when starting therapy for your child.

1) IT IS OKAY NOT TO TALK

For most children, talking about things is NOT the best way for them to express themselves or learn new skills. This is ESPECIALLY true for children who may have anxiety, attention challenges, or have gone through traumatic things. Instead, you can expect therapists to use a variety of ways to support your child in being able to understand and express their emotions and learn new skills. This can include art, play, games, role playing, sensory tools, music, movement, or even silence. This is NORMAL and does not mean that your child is not working hard or that therapy is not effective. It is NORMAL for children to move about the therapy room frequently, avoid difficult topics, and show bigger behaviors and reactions when under stress. Do not be surprised if the therapist does not offer immediate correction for these behaviors!

2) ADULTS HAVE A BIG ROLE TO PLAY

Depending on the child's age trusted adults may have more or less of a role within therapy. Generally, the younger the child the more their trusted adults should expect to be involved. Kids need adults to participate in therapy because:

- Trusted adults can help kids recall and use skills and ideas that therapy teaches.
- Trusted adults can help kids feel more comfortable and open to the process.
- Trusted adults modeling how to talk about feelings and cope can be a powerful tool in normalizing and addressing feelings.

However, adults can also make therapy uncomfortable and difficult. In general, adults should avoid:

- Using therapy as a time to recall all the bad/difficult behaviors from the last week.
- Blaming their child for things that have gone wrong.
- Telling their child what to talk about or how to best use therapy.
- Using therapy as a threat and/or reward for bad or good behavior.

Adult involvement in therapy is defined by what the therapist believes will be most helpful. Adults' participation in therapy can look like:

- Checking in before and after a child's session.
- Involvement directly within the therapy session.
- Observing their child within a therapy activity.

- Sharing information outside of sessions that the therapist might find useful or helpful in treatment.
- Adult-only sessions to discuss topics that may not be fully appropriate for a child to be a part of.
- Collaboratively planning therapy goals and evaluating progress on these goals.

3) THERAPY WITH KIDS CAN TAKE LONGER

Adults usually enter therapy with an understanding of what they would like to see change, areas of struggle, or how to best approach a problem. Children rarely understand what therapy is prior to starting. It can take more time for them to build trust with a therapist and understand that therapy does not mean that they are bad or that something is wrong with them. Adults should expect to be patient with their child within therapy. However, adults should also feel comfortable asking their child's therapist for updates or voicing concerns for goals/progress.

4) THERAPY IS NOT MAGIC

Children can use therapy in lots of ways. Adults should not expect that therapy will lead to immediate behavioral changes or significant mood changes right away. Also, children do not live alone. Change typically comes through BOTH the child and their significant adults doing hard work, making changes, and working together to understand problems and find solutions.

5) KIDS NEED CONFIDENTIALITY, TOO!

It is important that kids feel like their adults are invested in therapy. It is also important that they feel like they have privacy to discuss things. Confidentiality is something that is navigated carefully by the therapist. Generally, the older the child the greater the need for stricter confidentiality. However, you can expect that your child's therapist will share:

- The child's diagnosis and important treatment considerations.
- Treatment goals and progress being made toward goals.
- Significant safety concerns when necessary under the law.

You are always free to ask questions of your child's therapist and their treatment.

Therapists are often able to share general ideas of strategies that can be used, things to consider, or developmental or mental health information that can help you make the best choices for you and your family. However, therapists may also give limited answers or be unable to fully answer some questions to protect the child's confidentiality and safety within therapy.

Please feel free to ask questions of your child's therapist. It should feel like a collaborative and supportive relationship not just for your child but for their adults as well.