

0. Counseling of a Minor

This document outlines MBH's office policies related to counseling of a minor

OVERVIEW

The involvement of children and adolescents in therapy can be highly beneficial to their overall development. Often, it is best to see them with parents/guardians and other family members; sometimes they are best seen alone. We will assess which dynamic might be best for your child and make recommendations to you. The support of all the child's caregivers is essential and necessary in the therapy process. As your child's counselor gains a better understanding of your child's needs and strengths, he/she will make recommendations to you about support strategies you can implement to best support your child's therapy goals and overall wellness.

LEGAL/CUSTODY

Because our role is that of the child's helper, we avoid getting involved in legal disputes or other official proceedings unless compelled to do so by a court of law. This includes, but is not limited to, recommendations related to custody, visitations, mediation between parents, and parental fitness. Please refer to the Court Related Services section of our Disclosure & Consent document for detailed information about costs. You are responsible for any fees charged by MBH in the event we are ordered to participate in court proceedings.

Matters involving custody and mediation are best handled by another professional who are specially trained in those areas rather than by the child's counselor. We have referrals for both mediation specialists and counselors specializing in high-conflict family matters available upon request. If we suspect that your needs may be better served by utilizing one of these resources, we will make that recommendation to you, and your counselor will advise you if ongoing counseling services at MBH are possible.

To provide services to minors we ask for approval from ALL legal parents/guardians. In the event we are unable to obtain the consent of all parties, we may or may not continue with therapy. This decision is at the discretion of MBH and the treating counselor and will be determined based on the child's best interest and as well as legal and ethical considerations for MBH and its providers. In cases of sole legal custody, a copy of the custody order including parenting plan or any documentation related to decision-making or custody (guardianship, power of attorney, etc.) will be requested prior to establishing services with MBH.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Children under 14: The issue of confidentiality is critical in treating children. Children, under the age of

14, seen in individual sessions (except under certain conditions) are not legally entitled to confidentiality. However, unless children feel they have some privacy in speaking with a counselor, the benefits of therapy may be lost. Therefore, it is necessary to work out a balanced arrangement in which children feel that their privacy is generally being respected, and that parents/guardians have access to critical information. Even though the parent/guardian, typically, has the legal right to obtain information, our general recommendation is to limit inquiries to the child about the content of individual sessions, and if the child prefers not to volunteer information about the sessions, the parent guardian shall respect his/her right not to disclose details. This will be discussed in more detail by your counselor.

Children over 14: Conversely, children over the age of 14 are afforded additional legal protections related to confidentiality by Idaho code 16-2428. This means information cannot be shared with parents/guardians unless the child consents through a written release of information. Disclosure exceptions are outlined below:

- Disclosures which are necessary to obtain insurance coverage
- Disclosures which are necessary to carry out the treatment plan
- Disclosures which are necessary to prevent harm to the child or others in cases of suspected child abuse/neglect, or danger to self or others. In these cases the counselor is required to make an official report to the appropriate agency and will attempt to involve parents as much as possible.
- Disclosures which are ordered by the Court

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN COUNSELOR AND PARENT/GUARDIAN

In some cases, a child's parent or guardian may want to communicate information about significant events or concerns to the child's counselor, or vice versa. It is always recommended that this communication takes place within the therapy setting. MBH recommends that communication via phone calls, texts, and emails be limited to scheduling needs only.

The normal procedure for discussing issues related to the child's therapy will be through joint sessions including the child, the counselor, the parent/guardian and perhaps other appropriate adults. If the parent/guardian believes there are significant health or safety issues that the counselor needs to know about, the parent/guardian should contact the therapist and attempt to arrange a session with the child present. Similarly, when the counselor determines that there are significant issues that should be discussed with the parent/guardian, every effort will be made to schedule a session involving the parent/guardian and the child. In exceptional situations, the counselor may recommend a private session without the child present, but typically only after this has been discussed with the child first. When parents/guardians or others join a child in session, what is discussed is known to those present and should be kept confidential and private.

SUMMARY

The care and treatment of your child is of the utmost importance to us at MBH. The above information is intended to help educate you on our processes and recommendations around our counseling services at MBH. We encourage you to talk to your child's counselor about any questions you have after reading this document.

Client Full Name:

Parent/guardian Full Name