

## **Policy for working with Separated/Divorced Parents**

When a therapist is working with separated/divorced parents the counseling process can face many challenges. As a result, the therapist adheres to this policy to guide the counseling process to ensure that the best interest of the child is addressed in the counseling process.

### **Therapist Beliefs**

- The best treatment for children is for the child to be viewed within the context of their family and to involve all active and engaged caregivers to create the most significant change.
- Even though the parents have decided that separating is the right choice for them, the child does not share this view. All children will benefit from an ongoing relationship with both parents unless serious parental deficits and/or abuse and/or neglect are occurring which could significantly impact the health (physical and mental) and safety of the child.
- A child in counseling will experience the best outcomes if he or she believes that the therapist can be trusted to explore thoughts, feelings, and opinions. If the expectation is that the therapist reveals the content of the session to the parent(s), the child can and will shut down and will gain no benefit from the counseling process.
- The goal of the therapist is to help the child to cope with the challenges that their parents' separation or divorce has caused them and to develop skills to overcome those challenges. It is also the goal of the therapist to help the parents and family in any way that is appropriate to help the child to achieve these skills. It is not the goal of the therapist to pick sides or identify one parent as the right or best parent. It is also not the goal of the therapist to lecture one parent into complying with the demands of the other parent. This approach is counterproductive and not helpful to the child.

## **Policy for Working with the children of parents who are separated or divorced**

### **Legal/Custody**

- The therapist will require a copy of court documentation indicating custody arrangements, allowances, or restrictions for contact between parent and minor child,

court order, counseling or any other legal documentation related to the medical care of the child before any counseling will take place.

- The therapist will try to include both parents in the counseling process except for in cases when it is expected that doing so would cause serious detriment to the child.
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## **Communication**

- Parents should understand that ALL verbal and written communication (face-to-face, phone call, email, written communication, or any other documentation provided to the therapist) is allowed to be shared with the other parent and with the child if the therapist deems it necessary. However, the GOAL of therapy is to meet the child's best interest, therefore, the therapist has the right to keep information shared by either parent confidential if the therapist deems that revealing this may escalate conflict and in-directly or directly hurt the child. (Ex: addressing a parenting issue that may be occurring only at one home)
- Any written communication will become part of the child's clinical file as record of communication. It is unethical for the therapist to keep secrets regarding threats of bringing the other parent back to court, allegations of the other parent being the "cause" of the child's problems, threats to sabotage the parent's relationship with the child, etc. Aside from suspected abuse and neglect, the therapist cannot and will not keep these secrets to create the most healthy and productive working relationship.
- The law indicates that parents have the right to access records of their child's treatment, however, parents should understand the difference between mental health records and medical records and the sensitive information contained within them. Mental health professionals have the right to refuse release of these records to parents or any other entity if they believe that doing so would cause harm to the child. In cases of separation and/or divorce, this is almost always the case as information shared within these records can never be un-read by the parents and can and will impact the parent-child relationship going forward. Therefore, the therapist will not release the mental health record of the child to the parent when it is not in the child's best interests to do so, unless required by law. The therapist urges the parents to respect this policy as it is in place to protect the well-being of the child as well as the quality of the parent-child relationship.
- The therapist welcomes the involvement of extended family and/or stepfamily as necessary and appropriate for the course of treatment. However, for the therapist to communicate with other family members besides the biological family (biological parents and siblings), both parents must sign releases of information allowing that communication. Communication with extended family and/or stepfamily will not be

allowed unless both parents consent to that communication. Depending upon the age of the child, the child's consent may also be required.

- The therapist will provide a brief follow-up email to the parent not attending the session with their child. This email will be sent to both parents and will only include a brief description of how the session went. It will not contain detailed and confidential information. The therapist will accept brief phone calls under 10 minutes if email is not available. Any calls over 10 minutes will be charged a minimum fee of 25.00 and will be the responsibility of the parent making the call.
- The therapist will not accept phone calls, voice mails, emails or other communications directed at pitting the therapist against the other parent. If/when these communications are received, the other parent will be notified. Permitted communications include, but are not limited to:
  - Text messages/printed text message transcripts, and email.
- It is the therapist's duty to understand the history of the child and their family and what has contributed to the reason for counseling. This should not be misconstrued to mean that the therapist should be required to read or listen to any information that the parent(s) deem appropriate to share. The therapist reserves the right to dictate what information is appropriate and inappropriate for the counseling relationship and to refuse to accept information that isn't appropriate for the counseling relationship. Unless required by law, the therapist also reserves the right to ignore and/or not respond to any communication that is not appropriate for the counseling relationship, including but not limited to:
  - Emails used for the purpose of counseling
  - Requests for reviewing court documents –
  - Journals/written records of behaviors
  - Phone calls of inappropriate content –
  - Text messages between parent/parents and others –
  - Email correspondence between the parent/parents and others
  - Facebook messages, posts
  - Video, pictures and/or tape recordings of the other parent –
  - Voice mails
- Videotaping or recording phone calls/sessions/any communication involving the child and therapist is prohibited. The therapist reserves the right to end the counseling relationship should the therapist become aware of this occurring.

## **Financial**

- Each parent is responsible for filling out a payment policy provided by therapist and will provide therapist with a form of payment to be used according to what is court ordered for co-parenting financial agreements. Therapist will provide an invoice of the session to be used for reimbursement from health insurance (as indicated by each policy). Therapist is only able to email the invoice to one parent and who that parent will be decided on before the counseling process begins.

### **Scheduling**

- The therapist expects parents to communicate regarding scheduled appointments. The therapist will not be responsible for scheduling sessions according to non-custodial parent's visit schedule. It is not feasible to expect the therapist to remember the visit schedule and any changes to that schedule for each and every one of the children on her caseload.
- The therapist expects that the parent scheduling the session will show respect to the needs of the child to spend time with both parents and will refrain from specifically scheduling appointments as a way to take time away from the other parent.

### **Legal Proceedings**

- In some cases, one or both parents may decide to take legal action regarding custody of the child. Therapy and legal testimony are vastly different services and the therapist's goal first and foremost is to create a supportive, safe relationship with the child for the purpose of achieving therapy goals. The therapist cannot and will not provide a recommendation regarding custody of the child when acting as the therapist for the child and family. The therapist will communicate with legal professionals as required by law, but all professionals and parents should know that the therapist's responsibility is for confidentiality and protection of the counseling relationship, not to assist one parent in "winning" their case.
- The therapist cannot speak to one parent's attorney without the consent of the other parent. In most cases, this is not a productive idea, and the therapist recommends that there not be any communication between the therapist and attorney(s). When required by law, the therapist will communicate with legal professionals.
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By signing below, you agree to the following:

☐ I have read the statements above and agree to comply with the policies listed in this document.

☐ I understand that if I break any of the rules listed in this document, I may be asked to discontinue the counseling relationship.

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Parent or Guardian Signature

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Parent or Guardian Signature

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Therapist Signature

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