

After Divorce - Therapy for Children

Parent Contract

At Peak Counseling, our main objective working with children is to help them develop emotional stability and to strengthen their sense of self-worth and importance in life. As they transition into adulthood, our goal is to teach them the skills to live a happy and healthy life. One of the key indicators helping a child develop into a healthy adult is being raised within a loving and supportive family. Parents have the challenging responsibility to make sure this happens.

There are times when parents are unable to reconcile their differences and their relationship with each other ends in separation or divorce. As long as the parents work together in the best interest of their child, they can still foster a loving and supportive environment. This is called co-parenting.

When effective co-parenting already exists between both parents, individual therapy with the child is possible. However, at Peak Counseling we have found that when separated or divorced parents have a conflicting relationship with each other and are not co-parenting, that individual therapy with their child is **not** effective. In these situations, individual therapy with the child can be more harmful for them than helpful. When both parents continue to be in conflict with each other, two things often happen when the child starts individual therapy:

- Therapy with the child is often used for “evidence building” against the other parent for court and custody. One parent may want to prove that the other parent is not “fit” to have custody. When this happens, the therapist's clinical notes of the child’s therapy sessions are usually requested by one or both parents (which they have a legal right to have). When this happens the child often feels betrayed that what they said in a safe and confidential environment (therapy) is made public for both parents and others to hear. In addition, often one or both parents request the child’s therapist to testify regarding their individual therapy with the child. In the end, it is almost inevitable after the custody decision is made by the court that one or both parents feel the therapist didn’t support “their side of the story” and “threw them under the bus”. At that point, one or both parents usually abruptly pulls their child from therapy with little or no warning. Therapy ends up being more harmful to the child than helpful to the child.
- One parent or both parents may bring up issues regarding the other parent, hoping that the child’s therapist will talk with the other parent to convince them to change. However, this is not the role of the therapist.

What to expect for your child's individual therapy:

- Individual therapy sessions are usually between 30-60 minutes, depending on the child's needs.
- One-on-one time with your child, allowing them to freely communicate their thoughts and feelings without worrying about their parent's reactions.
- Parent's involvement is minimal, where the parent checks in with the child's therapist for 5 minutes or less at the start of the session, to let the therapist know about their concerns. Minimal parent involvement allows therapy to focus on just the child's issues, not the parent's issues.
- The parent can request updates and progress toward treatment goals at any time. These updates are by phone or person to person.

Your child's individual therapy is **NOT**:

- For purposes of court or custody.
- For one parent to address their concerns about the other parent.
- For changing the other parent.
- For family therapy.
- For co-parenting help.
- For helping parents manage disagreements.
- For determining if a parent is fit to be the child's parent.

In order to ensure that your child's individual therapy is used for just that, individual therapy, we request that both parents review this entire letter and agree to the following:

1. The parents agree not to use the child's records in any way for any type of court or custody matter.
2. The parents agree that the child's clinical records can only be used for clinical purposes, such as, but not limited to, giving records to another provider to improve the child's quality of care and continuity of care.
3. The parent agrees not to have the child's records released directly to themselves, unless the therapist deems that releasing those records to the requesting parent is clinically necessary in the child's clinical care or is in the child's best interest.
4. Any release of records needs to be signed by both parents. If one parent requests records for any reason, the therapist will inform the other parent that this request has been made.
5. The parent agrees not to request a written summary regarding the child's individual therapy (unless the written summary is for purposes of clinical care or continuity of care).
6. The parents agree not to request that the child's therapist testify in court.
7. As long as both parents have medical custody, both parents must sign a consent that Peak Counseling can treat your child. If both parents do not consent, we will not start treatment with your child. If treatment is already started and one of the parents no

longer agrees or consents to treatment, that parent must notify Peak Counseling of this in writing and therapy will be terminated immediately with your child.

8. The parent agrees to have their own individual therapist for themselves (whoever they choose)
9. The parents agree to find a co-parenting therapist, to help them manage parental agreements and conflicts. Both parents agree to sign a release of information to allow the child's individual therapist at Peak Counseling to communicate with the parent's co-parenting therapist. Individual therapy with the child will not be started unless both parents have established a co-parenting therapist. As long as conflict remains between both parents, it is required that both parents stay in co-parenting therapy as long as their child is in individual therapy at Peak Counseling.
10. If the parents are aware that they are going to court for custody of their child or anticipate that it soon will be going to court, we request therapy with your child not be started and only started after the court is finished. If therapy has already started with your child and your case is going back to court to decide custody, therapy will be temporarily halted until court is over and the determination has been made of custody.

****IMPORTANT: This agreement is between both parents, to avoid therapy causing harm to the child. However, please keep in mind that HIPAA states that a parent has full rights to all their child's records and information regarding the treatment of their child, regardless of this contract.**

By signing below, you acknowledge you have read this document and agree to the terms of individual therapy with your child. Both parents must sign this form.

Parent Signature _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

Parent Signature _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____