

The Benefits of Therapy Work with Children

A Guide for Parents and Carers



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What Is Therapy?

Therapy is a process where a trained practitioner can support your child to understand challenges that they may be facing. Therapy may also be called counselling and can take the form of talking therapy.

For children and young people, therapy may also incorporate the use of therapeutic play activities; writing; drawing; story telling; role play; sand therapy or mindfulness work, amongst others.

Some practitioners may be dedicated, trained 'Play Therapists' whilst others may incorporate play type work into their talking therapy.

Play Therapy: How It Works, Cost, & What to Expect

Play Therapy Techniques

- Making art
- Reading
- Playing with dolls
- Journaling
- Toy play
- Story-telling
- Playing games
- Sand tray
- Role-playing

CHOOSING therapy



There are many different types of therapy, all with their own theoretical background. Regardless of which type, they all aim to support the person to understand who they are, why and make any changes that they may want to.

Below is a summary of some of the main therapies you may come across, but there are others too.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy



Your thinking

Interpersonal Therapy



Your relationships

Psychodynamic Therapy



Your past

Family Therapy



Your family

Solution Focussed Therapy



Your strengths

Person Centred Therapy



What you pay attention to

(Foundation Psychology, 2024)

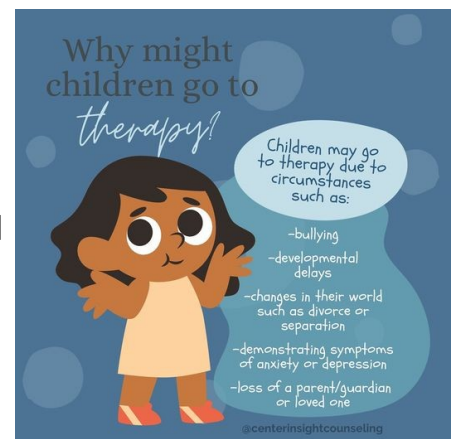


Why Might My Child Need To Go To Therapy?

There are many reasons why your child may need to attend therapy. Some of these may be:

- You have noticed a change in their behaviour which is worrying;
- They are finding it hard to express or manage their emotions;
- They are saying or doing things that make you worry for their safety;
- School are noticing that they are not being as involved or keeping up with their work in the way they usually are;
- There have been some significant changes in your family circumstance such as a death; divorce or separation; moving to a new place or illness.
- Your child has suffered a traumatic incident or experience and needs support to help them make sense of it.

Your child may be referred for counselling by you, their school or GP. All of those who work directly with children have a duty to care for their emotional and mental wellbeing.



It is important to remember that therapy can benefit children and young people at any age.



Why Is Therapy Beneficial?



Benefits of Child Therapy

Many people benefit from getting therapy. However, there are specific benefits that children can get when they receive treatment. Some benefits that can come from child therapy include:

- **Get Early Intervention**
Get help as early as possible rather than waiting until adulthood to address their mental health issues.
- **Learn About Therapy Early**
Children learn easily at a young age. Introducing them to therapy early can allow them to see that therapy is normal.
- **Express Their Feelings Openly**
Allows them to talk freely about issues they are experiencing without fearing repercussions from a parent or other adults in their life.
- **Teach Parents Valuable Skills**
Gain valuable skills and techniques to help your child cope with difficult feelings, and improve parent-child relationship.



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The earlier that someone can access therapy if they are experiencing challenges, the earlier the support can come for them. Children who suffer trauma, adversity and challenges with their mental wellbeing, and do not access therapy, may suffer with mental ill health in adulthood.

Some of the ways that therapy can be beneficial are:

- Helps children to understand and regulate their emotions and feelings;
- Supports with the development of good self-esteem, value and self-confidence;
- Can help a child to manage their behaviour in regard to their emotions;
- Can provide coping strategies for the child when they experience times of stress or anxiety;
- Help to build resilience which will also support in future life;
- Can help to improve communication, social interaction and the development of relationships;
- Supports with the understanding and processing of traumatic events;
- Can support with improving academic achievement;
- Can provide a safe, non-judgemental space for the child to express and understand themselves and their experiences.

How Can Therapy Help My Child With Feelings And Emotions?



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Working with a therapist means that your child will have a safe, confidential and non-judgemental space to be able to share and talk about their feelings. Sometimes children can find it hard to be fully honest with parents and carers as they can minimise their own feelings, to spare others. However, with a therapist, the child does not have to consider the feelings of the therapist and can therefore be completely honest.

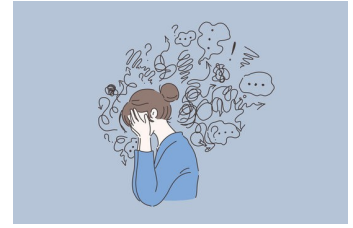
The therapist will welcome all emotions and feelings into the room and support your child to express, understand and process them. At the same time, the child will know that their feelings are important and validated.

Therapy can help your child to regulate their emotions, they can learn how to express them, but in a way that is appropriate and manageable. For example, therapy will not remove anger from your child, but instead, help them to process and show it appropriately. It can also help to understand what other emotions are driving the anger. Anger is rarely anger, but more likely to be a way of expressing confusion, hurt, sadness.

Engaging in therapy, both through talking and creative work, can help your child to learn about theirs and others emotions, understand what they are, label them, express them and feel them. All of this supports their emotional regulation and emotional intelligence.

Therapy can support your child to understand why they react in certain ways and why they feel the way they do. Through therapeutic work, they can understand the things that cause them to feel or act in certain ways and make changes if need be.

What If My Child Has Anxiety?



We can all feel anxious at different points in our lives and for many of us anxiety will pass without needing any intervention. However, when anxiety persists and impacts on our wellbeing and functioning, then seeking support is beneficial.

Anxiety in children can be caused by a number of factors including: challenging life events; increased expectations at school; social and friendship issues; or sometimes genetic factors.

What Might Anxiety Look Like?

In children anxiety can present differently and may be mistaken for something else. Some symptoms to look for include:

- Change in behaviour, such as crying more, or getting angrier than usual;
- Worrying about things more than usual;
- Changes in sleeping patterns or having nightmares;
- Avoiding doing things that they normally enjoy or like;
- Difficulty in being able to concentrate or focus;
- Feeling restless or fidgety;
- Physical symptoms such as headaches or feeling sick.

When anxiety is recognised and the feelings validated, your child can be supported to reduce their anxious thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It is important to pay attention to any physical or behavioural changes in your child and understand what is causing them, it may be anxiety.



How Can Therapy Help?

Therapy can help support your child with anxiety through a variety of ways, and also support them in understanding what is going on for them, and find ways to manage.

The Therapeutic Space

The therapeutic space is a safe, comfortable, confidential area where your child is supported to feel safe and heard. Through listening, being non-judgemental and empathising with your child, the therapist will support them to understand and express their feelings, and develop their ability to build resilience.

Understanding Anxiety

A therapist will help your child understand what anxiety is through appropriate 'psychoeducation'. This will allow your child to understand what anxiety is to help reduce the 'power' of it. It will also allow your child to see that anxiety is normal.

Your child's therapist will also support them to talk about and understand why they feel anxious and identify particular situations that may increase their anxiety. Once your child is aware of where their anxiety comes from, they can be supported to develop coping strategies to manage anxiety in the future. Alongside this, the therapist will help them to reframe their thoughts into more positive thinking. This is known as 'cognitive restructuring'.

Coping Skills And Strategies

Depending on the cause of anxiety, your child's therapist may support them to become more comfortable with the situation through a process called 'gradual exposure'. During this, they will safely support your child being introduced in small steps to the cause of anxiety. This is used often in phobia work.

One of the aims of therapy will be for your child to be equipped with a 'toolkit' of coping strategies that are appropriate to them. Therefore, the therapist may support them in developing self-soothing techniques such as breathwork; distraction techniques such as using fidget toys; assertiveness skills such as increasing their confidence and self-worth; or support them in developing problem-solving skills. Through developing coping skills, your child will be able to manage their own anxieties and challenges more effectively in future life.

Working with a therapist can also support your child to understand and regulate their emotions, as has already been discussed in the previous section.

What If My Child Has A Phobia?

What Is A Phobia?

A phobia is when we have an excessive fear of something that causes us significant anxiety and can impact on our ability to function.



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Phobias In Children

Children can develop phobias around a range of objects, experiences or environments. Phobias can sometimes be learned from others, for example, a child who sees their parents is terrified of spiders may develop the same fear.

Some common phobias in children are:

Dogs	Thunder and Lightning	Blood or vomit
Spiders	Separation from parents	Flying
Monsters	Strangers	Insects
Being in the dark	Loud noises	Shadows

How Can Therapy Help?

Therapy can support with phobias through helping the person to understand where the root of their fear has come from and helping them to reframe their cognitive thoughts about the situation so that their fear diminishes.

In order to do this, there are a number of steps that may be used:

Assessment—The therapist will assess with the child and potentially the parents, what the phobia is, the feelings and emotions linked to it and how much it is impacting on the young person. Once an assessment is in place, the therapist can make an appropriate plan for that young person.

Psychoeducation—As with anxiety, helping a young person to understand what a phobia is and where it may have come from helps to reduce the power and increase understanding. It also helps to normalise phobias. The therapist will tailor their approach with these to a method that is appropriate to each individual.

Cognitive Restructuring—This is where the therapist will help the child to change their negative thoughts about the thing that they fear. For example, if a child has a fear of dogs and thinks all dogs are 'bad', then the therapist can support them to understand where this has come from, what evidence they have for this and help them to reduce distorted thinking about all dogs. They can then help them to think of positive statements and thoughts about dogs, such as 'dogs are fluffy', 'dogs have waggy tails' etc rather than thinking 'the dog will bite me'.

Gradual Exposure—this is a common way that is used to treat phobias and results in the person gradually, and safely being exposed to the source of their fear. For example, if we stick with the theme of dogs, for a child who has a fear of them, the therapist may start by gradually exposing the child to photographs or story books that have dogs in them. They then might move on to toy dogs for the child to explore. They then may introduce videos of dogs with the ultimate goal to be that the child can be in contact with a real dog, without the fear.

Exposure Therapy

Exposure techniques help with anxiety disorders, phobias, PTSD, and more



How Can Therapy Help?

Positive Reinforcement Techniques—The therapist will use a range of positive reinforcement techniques whilst helping your child navigate their phobia. These techniques will include both relaxation strategies and behavioural techniques.

Relaxation techniques can include things such as conscious breathing techniques that are designed to slow down anxious breathing. Then when a child is exposed to the object of their phobia, they can calm down their automatic response of rapid breathing. It might also take the form of guided imagery where the therapist helps the child to picture a different, calming scenario in their minds, whilst gradually being exposed to their phobia. Both of these are designed to help the child control their fear responses through relaxation.

Behavioural reinforcement may take the form of something such as a tangible reward for the child when they take a step towards their fear. For example if a child is motivated by stickers, they may collect stickers each time they are able to look at a photo of a dog and manage to control their automatic fear responses.

Along with these, the therapist will support your child to develop other coping strategies that they are then able to utilise outside of the therapy room. For example, if a child learns how to 'box breathe' to help calm their anxiety in the therapy room, they can use this technique in the wider world. They may learn a skill such as 'self talk' where they can remind themselves of positive thoughts when they encounter their phobia.



What Are My Next Steps?

The role of you as a parent or carer in supporting your child's mental well being cannot be underestimated. Noticing and supporting your child at home is a positive step in helping them to feel safe and secure.

Depending on the age and needs of your child, your input into any assessment or follow up work suggested by the therapy can be vital.

Some key steps that you can take are:

- Be aware of any changes in your child's mood or behaviour;
- Foster an open and supportive environment at home;
- Model healthy emotional behaviour;
- Validate your child's thoughts and feelings;
- Keep consistency as far as is possible, this creates a safe and reassuring environment;
- Ask for support from health professionals or school if you notice changes that concern you;
- Seek professional support for your child from a trained child therapist.



Child Foundation Centre, (2024)

Child and Young Person Counselling at Dragonfly

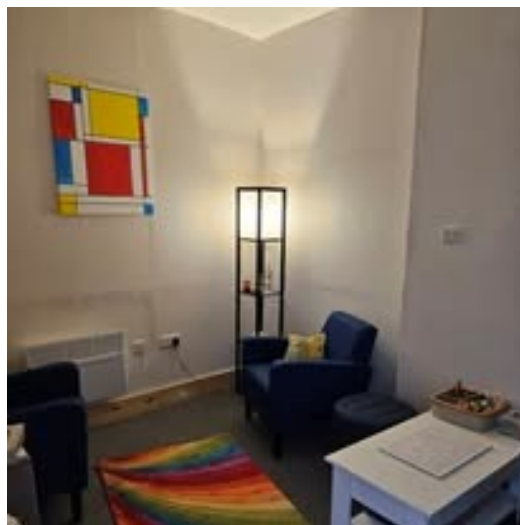
Counselling Service



My training is working in the Psychodynamic Model which in essence is about helping people understand why they think, feel or behave in certain ways, based on their experiences. For children and young people, early childhood, including the first 1001 days of life (including time in the womb) is key for their development and wellbeing.

Relationships, interactions, communication and their environment play vital roles in helping a young person grow and develop in a physically and mentally healthy way. When things happen that can impact on this development, it can lead to challenges with understanding emotions or resilience.

I support children and young people in the way that works for them. My practice is set up to incorporate different creative activities or play based work, including drawing; writing; story telling; sand-tray work or turn taking games. Children and young people can find it challenging to have or find the language and vocabulary needed to articulate their thoughts and feelings, so using creative means gives them a platform to help express themselves and make themselves understood.



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