

**ALERT:** In the event of a life-threatening emergency, call 9-1-1.

## It's a tough decision for a parent or caregiver, but it's the right decision.

When your child has mental, emotional or behavioral challenges, psychotherapy (therapy) can help. Children may not share their problems and feelings with you. They may not want to disappoint or hurt you. They may not understand what they are feeling or why they are acting in certain ways. Children of all ages can benefit from therapy when they aren't able to cope with what is going on in their lives.

A child psychotherapist (therapist) is trained to work with children and teens. They help children and their families understand behaviors and break down problems into smaller pieces. They give them tools to manage challenges and feel better about themselves.

## What is psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy helps a child improve their emotional well-being, coping skills, and behaviors. It includes talking and may also have play, art, and other activities that will help children express their thoughts and feelings. It is also called counseling.

Psychotherapy helps a child and family learn:

- About their moods, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.
- Good communication skills at home and at school.
- How to work out problems and try out new solutions in a safe space.

Psychotherapy is offered in different ways. For younger children, parents and caregivers are often involved in the psychotherapy visits. Older children and teens may see their therapist on their own and include the parent or caregiver before or after the visit. Sometimes the whole family is involved. Other times, group therapy with peers works best.

## What happens at the first visit?

A therapist will ask you and your child many questions. This helps them know how to best help your child. During this visit, tell the therapist as much as you can about your child's and family history, stressors, strengths, and problems. Tell the therapist what has worked in the past, and what has not. You and your child may also fill out some forms.

Much of what happens early in therapy is for the therapist and child to develop trust with each other. The child must feel safe, comfortable, and understood so they participate in the therapy activities that will help them get better.

## What is a treatment plan?

A treatment plan is a written set of goals you, your child, and the therapist make during the first few visits. These goals help your child learn and practice new skills and behaviors. You and your child will work on these goals in therapy, at home, and in school. A treatment plan and goals will change during treatment as your child's and family's needs change.

### How often will we see our therapist?

This will depend on your child's and family's needs. You will agree on a schedule for visits as a part of the treatment plan. Most sessions last 45 minutes to 1 hour. Therapy visits can happen as often as weekly. In the beginning of therapy, visits may be more often as you plan and work on new goals. As your child meets their goals and is feeling better, they may need fewer visits.

### How long does therapy last?

This too depends upon your child's and family's needs. It takes time to learn and make meaningful changes. You will not see instant results. Some therapy may take many months. Coming to all scheduled appointments and working on the treatment plan at home helps. Talk to your child's therapist about how long they think therapy may last.

### What is the parent or guardian role in therapy?

You play a very important role! To make the most of your child's experience in therapy, please make sure you and your child make every scheduled visit. Tell the therapist about your child's and your family's progress and setbacks since the last visit. Share your concerns, questions, and feedback. Help your child work on their treatment plan goals between visits. Ask your child's therapist for reading materials, online resources, or parent support groups. Therapy can be difficult; make sure to acknowledge your child's efforts and progress when you see it. Support and guide them when they are struggling.

### What if there is a problem in between therapy visits?

Call your therapist if you have concerns between visits. **In the event of a life-threatening emergency, call 9-1-1.**

### How does the therapist know when my child is done with therapy?

Your child will likely be done with therapy when they meet all or most of their treatment plan goals. This means they are feeling and doing better! Everyone should agree that ending therapy is the best thing to do. You, your child, and the therapist will talk about how to know when it is time for this to happen.

### What happens when therapy is done?

The therapist will create a discharge plan with your input to help your child and family. This will help you and your child continue all of the great work that happened in therapy. It may include post-discharge goals, resources, safety plans, and other helpful information.

You can call anytime if you feel it is best for your child to return to therapy.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.**