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FAQ For Parents of Teens Starting Counselling/Psychotherapy

Thank you for supporting your teen and in trusting a Registered Professional to work with your teen in their best interest. It can of course be challenging to send a teen to a private space, and not know what is going on or being talked about in that space. Trust that, like you, I always am working towards every teen's best personal health, safety, and life satisfaction in every session. So let's talk about a few things ahead of time so we are all on the same page. These are some of the most common questions or concerns that come up from parents who have their teens in therapy.

1. What do I (the parent(s)) get to know about, and what is confidential?

Teens – in fact, anyone in Ontario who can be deemed able to understand the confidentiality forms that we sign at the beginning of sessions, regardless of age – are considered clients unto themselves. This means that they are afforded the full confidentiality rights – even if they are “underage” for other things in their life. What this means is that I won't be able to disclose *any* of the information that we talk about in session with you as the parent(s) – unless it has to do with immediate high risk safety of your teen that you need to be involved in to ensure safety. These limits to confidentiality are listed on the confidentiality form that you can read through as well, but generally include high risk to self, to others, to public safety, to children, or in the case of a subpoena, and not in every case does a parent need to be informed.

Beyond these items, other "harmful" behaviours (i.e. self-harm, drug/alcohol use, sexual activity, most disordered eating behaviours, shoplifting, etc), are not included in this confidentiality clause and would not be disclosed to parents. Those are worked on within sessions with the teen to manage these with planning and various approaches such as harm reduction, stages of change, CBT or ACT, etc.

2. What can I (the parent(s)) share with you (the therapist)?

You can technically always share information with me, but please know that I will have to disclose our conversations to your teen as part of their rights as a client of mine. If you want to share information with me, or you want to email me certain information, please keep in mind that it will be documented or printed, and stored in your teen's file, which your teen will have access to should they request it. By keeping an open line of communication with every client about external conversations that involve them, it helps every client feel safe, secure, and in a trusting environment where they can do their best work with me to safely explore any concerns or thoughts.

3. What do I (parent(s)) do if my teen comes home and tells me about something in a session that I don't agree with?

Sometimes my role involves helping a teen learn to advocate for themselves or explain or explore issues or concerns that they are having with their parents from their own perspective on things that may be going on in the house. Sometimes, wires can get crossed in a bit of a game of telephone from session to home or vice versa. Please also remember that I can only work with the information that I am given from a teen within a session and that I am always working to best support a teen's mental, physical, and emotional health and wellbeing. This may involve exploring certain house rules or parenting approaches in a healthy way to achieve the best outcome for your child's personal wellbeing.

If a teen brings up something from a session with you that you do not agree with, try to use the conversation as a way to help them explore their deeper thoughts and feelings and why they have brought this up with you. You don't have to end up agreeing with them or what they might be exploring (ideas around independence, around parenting or being parented, rules in the house, etc.), and the final decision is always up to you as the parent, but know that sometimes these conversations are in themselves sometimes a healing or therapeutic opportunity for your teen and your relationship with them. If I have worked with a teen to encourage them to find their voice – even with you – this does not mean that I am advocating a final outcome, but likely that there is something important missing in communication with you as the parent(s) or in the understanding between you and your teen that likely needs to be further discussed or explored as a family.

This being said, if further clarification from me directly is required about something from a session that your teen has relayed to you, you (the parent(s)) and I (the therapist) would still need to ask your teen permission to discuss or clarify anything outside of sessions, and they must give this consent freely and without coercion or pressure, as mentioned above.

4. What if I (as the parent) want to attend a session?

At times, if a teen is open to a group meeting, parent(s) can attend sessions with a teen's permission so that we can explore ideas all together – but this requires the teen's informed and freely given consent, and the final decision on this is always up to them. Parent(s) are considered "guests" to the session – as a way to work on communication, mediate, or share learning and approaches we (your teen and I) may have worked on in session together to best support your teen at home as well. Please note that this is different than "family therapy" which uses different approaches and modalities. If you are interested in doing family sessions ongoing, please consult Psychology Today or other resources to find a family therapist that suits your ongoing needs.

5. What about the goals that I (the parent) want my teen to work on in sessions?

As a parent, having goals or ideas for your teen in session can be a great place for us to start from, especially if teens are a bit nervous or unsure about how to get started. After all, you know your teen, their habits and patterns better than almost anyone. Now, that being said, if I am given a list of "goals" from a parent for their teen, I cannot guarantee this will be the nature, content, or the outcome of sessions with your teen. Once a teen is working in sessions with me, their world, and their views, and their (healthy) goals, become the focus. We cannot actually really work on goals in a meaningful way that your teen themselves does not see as an issue. For an example to understand this, think of this maybe as someone telling *you* that you need to work on your driving skills, when you yourself don't see this as an issue – you wouldn't want to spend time talking about this in sessions if it wasn't even on your radar.

That being said, if you do help identify areas of growth or some goals for your teen, I certainly will at least be bringing these ideas up in session to determine readiness or resonance of those particular goals for your teen at that point in their life.

6. What if I have general questions about therapy, for instance, if I am not looking for direct information about sessions with my teen, but for resources or best practices for me, as the parent, at home?

Great! Learning and being open to new ideas can often be a great place to start. Remembering that emails will be documented in your teen's file, as mentioned above, and that points of contact will often be shared with your teen, you are free to email me questions or ask for resources – however, lengthy questions or conversations (items that take longer than 15 or so minutes to cover or respond to) will have a charge applied for the time allotted. To get you started, here are a few of my favourite book and video resources, as well:

The Whole Brain Child – Daniel J. Siegel and Tine Payne Bryson

Parenting From the Inside Out – Daniel J. Siegel

How to Talk So Teens Will Listen, and How to Listen So Teens Will Talk – Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish

And my YouTube video called “Do You ‘Overreact’ and Don’t Know Why?” <https://youtu.be/4fPAANjtMII>

7. What else can I do to support my teen?

This is a great question! There are huge bodies of research that support the fact that the more work you are able to personally do as a parent on *yourself*, the better your children will fare, too. It can be difficult to think of taking time out, or even dedicating finances to do some of your *own* work as a parent – and many parents can struggle with feeling selfish at the thought of taking this time and these resources “away” from their children. But, trust me in saying that if you have any inclination or willingness to spend this time on yourself, you *will* add to and improve your child's wellbeing, too. The book listed above, *Parenting From The Inside Out*, talks about this idea in much more depth and breadth. If you are able and ready, think about attending some counselling for yourself, as it can go a long way in helping your teen with whatever they might be struggling with, too. The more we can learn about and cope with our own triggers, fears, past hurts and traumas, or other stresses in our lives, the better we can relate and manage our present day relationships, too. Take care of yourself along the way, too! Parenting is truly one of the toughest jobs there is out there in this world, so be kind to yourself and think of your own self-care, support networks, and coping resources, as well.

Thank you for choosing psychotherapy for your child, and I look forward to working with your teen.