



CHILD THERAPY: EXPECTATIONS VS REALITY

THE DIFFERENT SHAPES OF THERAPY

Most people think of therapy as a client and therapist sitting in a room together an hour a week talking. That is what parents typically expect when they first think of getting help for their child.

Also, when seeking help for their child, parents typically feel exhausted, stuck, and helpless. Feeling unable to help their child themselves, they are often desperate for the psychologist to make things better for their child.

The first step in therapy is to explore the most helpful and effective approach to helping the child. Parents are surprised that we often suggest something different to the weekly child and therapist model.

Of course, there are times when a child or teenager may benefit from talking to someone outside of the family. And so, we do provide this type of therapy, but perhaps only 30-50% of the time.

Here are some other ways we work with children and why:

★ Therapy through the parent and/or school

Sometimes we never meet the child at all. All therapeutic work is done through the parent and/or school. There are many reasons for this:

Please go to our website www.pocketfamilypsychologist.com for additional family resources.

- It may be more difficult if changes to their school or family environment do not take place first.
- A parent is with a child most of the week and can catch those relaxed or opportune moments whilst a child might feel nervous or scared with a therapist.
- We have found change to be more sustainable when we help to change a parent's or teacher's understanding and sense of competency in helping the child.
- Ensuring the child does not have a sense of themselves of being different or needing therapy.
- Sometimes the parents and teachers need the space and care every bit as much as the child.

Therapy with the child and family together

We might meet the parents to discuss the concerns first and then invite the child to join subsequent sessions. Together we explore the family rules, roles and responsibilities alongside the issue of concern and what the family could do about it. This can be very powerful because:

- We get to work with the child's environment and the child!
- The strength, resourcefulness and love of a family is astounding. Big changes can happen very quickly when they are given the space and support to reflect, discuss and explore together.
- The child feels the support of the therapist and their family together.

Groups and Mentoring

We plan to include peer workshops facilitated by a psychologist as part of our online programmes for parental separation and bereavement. The benefits of group over individual therapy are:

- All of the reasons mentioned in the point above.
- We get to work with the child's environment and the child!
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- The child feels the support of the therapist and their family together.

Physical and sensory interventions

When children are struggling with trauma, anxiety, sleep disturbance, anger problems and behaviour difficulties there are often underlying problems with emotional and physical regulation. The child's system becomes easily overstimulated or overwhelmed and they struggle to calm back down again. It can be useful to introduce sensory and physical interventions alongside or instead of traditional talking therapy. Trampolining, swimming, building dens, weighted blankets, yoga, singing, drumming, and eating can all become therapy! This applies to adults too. The benefits are:

- Psychological therapy is applied more easily and more quickly once the physical regulation is in place.
- The child does not have a sense of themselves of being different or needing therapy.

Work with your therapist to think more flexibly about the best way of supporting or bringing about change for your child – this may well fall outside of the traditional therapy model. Our family consultation model at Pocket Family Psychologist is designed to provide a more flexible space for individuals or families to access psychological support and think creatively about the shape this should take.

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