

Preparing your Child for Psychotherapy

Children, like adults, may feel somewhat nervous about attending psychotherapy. That said, many children are actually relieved to be attending therapy and often don't have any difficulty understanding the role of the psychotherapist. Parents can make a huge difference in how their children feel about seeking help. Please consider the following tips when preparing your child for psychotherapy.

- *Choose the right time.* If children are informed about psychotherapy when they are angry, upset or acting out, they will be more likely to view seeking help as a “punishment”. Select a calm, peaceful moment to discuss psychotherapy with your child.
- *Let them know why they are attending psychotherapy.* Be clear with your child about the problem. You may want to say something like, “I can see you’ve been feeling very angry lately.” Or, “You’re teachers have shared that you appear to be very sad at school these days.” Let them know that you are worried about them without making them feel as though there is something “wrong” with them.
- *Demonstrate empathy.* Let your child know that you understand how difficult their struggles must be for them. Use statements like, “I must be very hard for you to feel this way every day.”
- *Explain psychotherapy.* Let your child know that you are taking them to see a person who might be able to help them. Let them know that I am a person who likes children and wants to help people with their difficult feelings. If you have attended psychotherapy you may want to let your child know that it was helpful for you.
- *Outline the expectations.* Many children feel apprehensive about talking to a therapist about their thoughts and feelings. Let your child know that it is ok for them to attend psychotherapy and to *listen* to the therapist or to *play* with the therapist, if that is what they are comfortable with. Explain to them that we may be drawing, reading books, playing games, and using toys in addition to talking.

If you have any questions or comments about your child’s involvement in psychotherapy, please do not hesitate to bring them to my attention.