

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT COUNSELING

Caregivers are often worried about protecting their child from further harm after their child has disclosed sexual and/or physical abuse. Caregivers often question whether counseling would do more harm than good in their child's situation. This handout is meant to address some of your concerns openly, and to explain why counseling is believed to be a critical piece in your child's healing process.

Here are some common questions and concerns that parents have about counseling:

1. My child seems fine. There have been no changes in her behavior. Why does she need counseling? **There are many different ways that children deal with a difficult experience. Your child's reaction to being a victim of abuse is unique to him/her. Sometimes when children seem "fine," they may still have questions or distressing thoughts about what occurred. Counseling can help to give you and your child some tools to deal with what has happened so you all can readjust to the routines of your life.**
2. I just want her to forget this ever happened. Won't counseling cause my child to keep thinking about her abuse and create more problems? My family needs to move past this! **It is natural to wish that the abuse never happened. It is natural to want life to somehow go back to the way things were before you found out that your child was being abused. We do not know how much of what your child has experienced they will remember. What we do know is that we cannot erase the past or change what has already occurred. We believe it is important for your child to have the opportunity to process their experiences through play therapy, group therapy and/or traditional talk therapy. A therapist who has been trained to work with children on their abuse issues will never "force" a child to talk about what has happened. We know that addressing what has occurred in a therapy setting is many times the quickest path to wellness.**
3. My child says he doesn't want to talk about what happened to him anymore. If he does not want to go to counseling, I don't feel it's right that I should make him. **When abuse occurs (especially sexual abuse), there is often a lot of secrecy that surrounds the act. That same secrecy makes it hard for children to disclose their abuse and talk about it openly. That same secrecy increases the chances that children may hold on to thoughts and feelings about themselves that are not healthy. This can negatively impact their ability to function in some areas of their lives. Having your child in counseling is another way to communicate to them that they can talk about what has happened to them, and you will make sure they have the support they need to be healthy. Please remember a trained therapist, who has experience working with children who have been abused, will never "force" your child to do anything. A trained therapist will use specific tools and techniques to help your child in his/her healing process.**

4. I don't have the money or health insurance to pay for my child's counseling. What can I do about this? **There are some counseling programs that are grant funded including the groups in the Family Support Program (FSP), and you may not have any out of pocket expenses for those services. You may also be eligible for Victims of Crime Compensation Funds if you can cover the expenses of counseling up front and afford the wait time to be reimbursed.**
5. My son is being referred for counseling, but I am a single parent and I cannot take time off from work. I also am not interested in my child missing time from school. Will a therapist work with my schedule? **Every therapist is different, but many will have some flexibility in their schedules to try and accommodate you. One thing to consider as you look at your schedule and that of your child is the "investment" potential of counseling. We firmly believe that "investing" time in counseling now can help to address the current symptoms your child may be dealing with as a victim of abuse, and help him/her improve their ability to deal with other difficult situations that may occur later in life. Many times, because abuse does not leave lasting physical scars, people are tempted to think, including the children themselves, that no further treatment is needed. If your child had suffered a physical injury and he/she had physical therapy appointments for several weeks after that, most parents would find a way to accommodate this treatment need. Likewise, it is important to help to make sure your child is mentally and emotionally healing from what has happened to him/her. A trained therapist can be invaluable in this process, but only with your support and active participation in your child's treatment. Often the counselor is able to estimate how long the treatment might last and it is always all right to ask.**
6. I know my child better than anyone! I don't want a therapist telling me what's going on with my child. **You are right, you are the expert on your child, and you know your child better than we ever could in our professional role. It is not a therapist's job to take over any of your responsibilities as a parent. We know that sometimes, when parents have been blindsided by their child's abuse, it can help the whole family heal from this experience in a healthier manner if someone outside of the situation is there to offer professional support and expertise. Children who have been abused have all of the same needs that you have been trying to meet thus far: needs for affection and love; basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, access to medical care; need for structure/routines and discipline in their life; need to play and socialize with children their own age; etcetera. Now that you are aware the abuse has happened, your child may have a few additional needs. Therapy offers an added safety net for your child and family to help ensure that you all will recover and eventually have the tools to thrive after this experience. We know that the most important person in your child's life at this time is you. Your belief in your child, willingness to protect them, and love for them is irreplaceable. Counseling is meant to just enhance what you are all ready seeking to provide to your child.**
7. My child had some behavioral problems before all this happened and has been in counseling before. I need a therapist to fix the problem, and counseling has not helped thus far. **Counseling is not a "quick fix" or a "magic pill." Counseling for sexual abuse and/or physical abuse is meant to address the issues that brought you into a place like the Child Assessment Center**

(CAC), and help your child and your family heal from that experience. The counseling that is being recommended to address the issues related to the sexual abuse and/or physical abuse of your child is a different type of counseling than what your child has had in the past to address their general behavioral concerns. Your child may need continued therapeutic interventions to address other mental health and/or behavioral issues. It will be important to discuss this concern with the treatment team that is providing the counseling for the sexual abuse and/or physical abuse.

8. I am struggling to believe my child's disclosure of abuse. My child has lied about other things, so how do I know that he is not lying about this too? **Other parents have struggled with believing their child's disclosure of abuse. It may be especially difficult to believe your child when the person they are accusing is someone you have trusted. What we know is that the overwhelming majority of children do not lie about their victimization history. A counseling environment provides a safe place for you and your child to express what you think and feel without judgment. A skilled therapist, who has expertise addressing abuse issues, will help you to work through your concerns.**

If you have additional questions and/or concerns about follow up counseling, please contact one of our hospital social workers by calling 614-722-8200.

To schedule an intake appointment for your child's first counseling appointment to address their exposure to sexual abuse, physical abuse and/or domestic violence, please contact the Family Support Program's Intake Coordinator directly at 614-722-8212.

Thank you!