

Parent Handbook
For
Child and Family Counseling, PLLC

Please Keep for Your Reference

1315 West Main St, Suite D/E
Lexington, KY 40508
(859) 913-9899

Dear Parent,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to help you, your child or adolescent, and family. It is not easy to ask for help and allow someone else to take your child to another room “to do psychological stuff” to them. We understand there is a desire to be able to trust us and we want you to feel you can trust us to help you. It is this reason we have developed this handbook to share with you to introduce our child therapists and the services we may be able to provide to you. If you have ANY questions not answered in this book, please feel free to ask us. We want you to understand the counseling process with us, how it works, and whatever you need to know in order to feel comfortable to allow us to help your son or daughter. We want you to feel confident we are helping your child/adolescent and/or helping YOU help your child/adolescent.

We speak three languages here: Play, psychobabble, and English. If we are telling you something you do not understand, please stop us and say, “In English, please.”

Again, thank you for allowing us to help you.

Respectfully,

Your Child’s Therapist

This handbook shares general information on: the risks of counseling, the goals and methods of counseling/therapy and treatment, how long it might take to complete treatment, how much counseling/therapy costs & how we handle payment for services.

This is your handbook to keep as a reference. Please read and mark any questions you have so we can discuss them. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your counselor/therapist or the Center's Owner, Janet Vessels, at (859) 913-9899. If you choose to receive service at the Center, you will be asked to sign a form indicating you agree that this handbook outlines how we will work together with you and your child/adolescent to resolve the issues you choose to address.

Mission Statement

The Child and Family Counseling will provide affordable mental health counseling, marriage and family therapy, parent training/support, and advocacy to children, adolescents and their families. The Center will offer continuing education and training for mental health professionals. Mental health professionals will receive an encouraging environment to grow and develop their professional skills.

Our Counselors and Therapists

Please visit our website at www.yourkycounselor.com and review the individual biographies for our professional staff.

Services Offered at the Center for Child and Family Counseling, PLLC

A variety of services are offered at the Center. Many of our counselors/therapists are trained in play therapy; others are trained in marriage and family therapy or clinical counseling. Some of the counselors prefer to work with children and others with adults. We will take the time to find the best fit to help you and your family. We all have specialty areas in order to provide the best services to our clients/families. Generally, we offer marriage & family therapy, traditional "talk" therapy with individuals and groups, various methods of play therapy with children/adolescents, several trauma therapies, parent & family evaluations, parent consultation & coordination, divorce & co-parenting counseling. A few of our counselors will provide mental health evaluations of children/families for the Court and/or testimony in court hearings as the "Child's advocate."

The First Session

What can you expect from the first session? It depends on the age of the child, if the child/adolescent wants to meet with the counselor/therapist alone, and if you'd like to meet prior the child attending a session. We will meet with you and/or your child/adolescent/family as appropriate to discuss your view of the problems and your concerns. In any evaluation, your perception of what the problem is, and how it affects you and your family's life is very important. We will discuss what you expect from counseling/therapy. Whether those will be reducing the difficulties, resolving the core problems, or decreasing/eliminating negative effects on you and your family an outcome or goal focused treatment helps us really develop a good plan and awareness of when we reach the end of treatment. In planning a trip, you have to know what your destination is before you begin.

In order to submit a session to any insurance company, a mental health diagnosis is necessary. Often a diagnosis of adjustment disorder, anxiety or depression is given after the first session. A complete diagnostic interview and evaluation is completed and sometimes a diagnosis may change if more information is provided during treatment.

Play Therapy

One of the best ways to help your child is through play. Play is the language of children and how they work through and achieve developmental milestones, learn social skills and expectations, understand their abilities, relationships, expectations and work through problems. Children have worked out their problems through play for a very long time. Play therapy uses play to help them overcome their difficulties encountered in their life when they are unable to do it themselves or with parent or adult guidance. If we decide to use play therapy, I will provide you and your child with resources to understand the process better. Many of our counselor/therapists are trained in various types of play therapy. Most of our staff specialized in play therapy and either has or is working on the specialized credentials of “RPT or RPT-S.” A registered play therapist or registered play therapist-supervisor means they have reached the highest level of training, education and experience in play therapy and/or supervision of play therapy. This credential is recognized by the Association for Play Therapy and you may find out more about play therapy at www.a4pt.org or pick up a “Why Play Therapy” brochure from our office.

Expressive Therapies

In addition to play therapy, other expressive therapies may be used to help your child “work through” their difficulties. Art, music, and sandtray may be helpful to enhance the body-mind connection. Drawings, painting, clay and other mediums are used to help the client gain knowledge of their feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Self-awareness, managing emotions, and learning to control their distress are essential strategies learned with art.

Music allows the brain to process material in a fun and creative manner. Whether playing music, listening or writing songs, music is healing to the mind and often the client’s chosen medium to help them solve their problems.

Sandtray therapy uses miniatures to build scenes in the sand. The counselor/therapist helps the client understand their story and how it affects the client, and the changes possible with insight and self-awareness.

“Talk Therapy”

Counselors or Therapists are trained in the traditional “talk therapy” and some children/adolescent prefer or are capable to discuss their problems with talking counseling techniques. Children and adolescent who understand and can verbalize their thoughts and feelings may benefit from this type of counseling/therapy. We try to fit the client’s developmental age, and preference. Often adolescents decide they would to engage in more playful approach. Sometimes talk therapy can include educational or therapeutic activities to provide a variety of learning methods for optimal growth and self-awareness. Popular “talk therapy” used may be cognitive-behavioral, dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), brief or solution focused therapy, reality therapy, and ego state therapy.

Family Therapy

One cannot be successful with children or adolescents unless the parents or caregivers are involved in the process. Family counseling/therapy may be used to help a child when they cannot understand their strengths and use them to solve their difficulties. Family members can help the child/adolescent with support and encouragement to change. Family dynamics can affect a child/adolescent’s behaviors, thoughts and feelings. Sometimes family interactions change to accommodate for the child or another family member’s problem, this type of counseling/therapy can help to work through this issue.

Parent Consultation

Regular parent consultation sessions are helpful to assess that goals are on target, to offer support and feedback. Bring your questions about your child/adolescent’s progress and what you can do at home to support your child.

Parents often request consultation to become better parents or provide behavior management ideas to make their parenting more effective. We are happy to help and many of us are encouraged that even small changes in parenting affect big change and make counseling more successful quicker!

Trauma Therapies

Many of the Center's counselors/therapists are trained in the treatment of trauma with children and adults. Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy (TF-CBT), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) are the specific types of treatment offered and are either considered evidence based, "trauma-informed" or "trauma-specific" treatments.

Parent & Family Evaluation

Family Court may require a parent or family evaluation to consider changes in child custody/visitation. These evaluations are completed not by the counselor already serving the client, but an alternative counselor who can be unbiased and is previously uninvolved with the child's treatment in order to provide the most objective evaluation possible. This service is NOT covered by insurance.

Divorce Counseling

Children and parents are affected by divorce; education, support and encouragement are needed during this unusually stress event. We provide playful and educational counseling/therapy to make this transition easier to handle.

Co-Parent Counseling & Parent Coordination

When parents are in mild-moderate conflict and unable to work out a visitation agreement or negotiate their visitation time they may consider co-parent counseling to learn ways to communicate and manage their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors to better make decisions in the best interest of their children.

In a high conflict divorce situation or when domestic violence occurred prior to divorce, conflict may continue afterwards and make it difficult to work together in the best interest of your child. Parent Coordination helps by being a third party and listens to each parent perspective about their ideas, considers what is in the child/adolescents best interest and offers a recommendation to the Court.

Court Hearing/Testimony

Parents often seek mental health and counseling services to gain information or evidence for Court proceedings, usually in child custody and visitation situations. A therapeutic relationship that develops with a child in order to use in court is not an ideal or preferred scenario. The child begins to trust the counselor/therapist, shares information that they feel may be hurtful or a secret to a parent. When a counselor/therapist is forced by subpoena to testify, this sensitive information may be revealed. The outcome is damage to the child-therapist/counselor relationship. The child may learn they cannot to trust adults to help them in the future. The child may believe the counselor/therapist can save them from an "unsafe parent" in custody or visitation hearings and this may not be the case. A counselor, while often exempt from hearsay rules, is considered a biased witness and advocate for the client. A Judge makes the decision on custody and visitation based on evidence, the counselor/therapist is only one witness.

A child or parent may request a counselor/therapist act as the child's voice in the court proceedings when they believe a parent does not consider their best interests or the child's mental health is in jeopardy is visitation is continued.

Behavioral Therapy and Interventions

Some issues are resolved quickly with behavioral therapy and interventions. OCD and other anxiety disorders have evidence to support the use of cognitive behavioral therapies. We will discuss when this type of therapy and intervention is useful. At home between sessions, often monitoring of behavior or behavior tracking and behavioral interventions are helpful and effective to change behaviors and reinforce positive behavior at home. Remember, some behaviors get worse before they get better. Noticing the behavior may make it increase and it will go away eventually with the correct interventions. Behavioral monitoring sheets, OCD journal, feelings journals, success plans are often used to encourage self-awareness and positive change.

Other Questions

How long does counseling take with children? Usually two to four months of counseling allows enough time to handle most common childhood problems. However, an individualized treatment plan will help the counselor/therapist better estimate length of treatment. It is important to do a complete evaluation and discuss with you resources, and support needed and helpful.

How will we know when it's time to stop counseling? Ending counseling or "termination" of services with children can be difficult for children and ought not to be taken lightly. It is a very important that it is done correctly to allow the child to process their success in treatment and how they can use it as a guide in the future. If you wish to stop services at any time, we would ask that we have one session to review the work that has been done and review their progress. This is needed, because often when a child is denied this process with a counselor they are close to, they may act out their loss. The best way to end counseling is to reduce the number or frequency of sessions until there are no more sessions are needed.

Sometimes there needs to be a "vacation from counseling/therapy" to see how your child/adolescent will react to not seeing a counselor or to see how the child will react to the end of the relationship with the counselor. If you would like to do this, please discuss it with us so we can schedule this appropriately. We can often make it easier for your child to cope with this situation if we are prepared for it.

What are the benefits and risks of counseling/therapy?

As with any treatment, there are many benefits and some risks in counseling/therapy. As the parents, you want to weigh the benefits and risks when choosing making any decision for your child/adolescent. For example, you child's emotions may become more intense and uncomfortable for a time. Sadness, anger, loneliness, and guilt are expected and not unusual when feelings are uncovered during sessions. Negative thoughts or reactions about himself/herself or awareness of "family secrets" may cause the child/adolescent to react or act out. They may share these family secrets with the counselor/therapist. Your child/adolescent may recall unpleasant and uncomfortable memories may and affect them at school or home. It is not uncommon for the child's problems to temporarily worsen after the beginning of treatment. There is no guarantee, even with counseling/therapy through our best effort; our services will be helpful to your child.

While you consider the risks, you must also know there are many research based studies that indicate counseling/therapy is beneficial to children with a variety of problems. In counseling/therapy, children have a chance to play through or talk through their problems until they feel relief from their difficulties, their problems are resolved, or they develop or improve their coping skills. They may attain more satisfaction in their relationships and social activities. Their personal goals and values may become clearer and identity may become more stable. They grow into themselves and experience success in many ways. We call this optimal functioning. We do not accept clients we are unable to help or those with which we do not have experience or specializations to help without believing we can make progress and achieve success.

What if we cannot help your child?

If we cannot help your child, we will assist you in finding the right resource to help you and your child/adolescent. You have the right to ask about the risks and benefits of other treatment options. We may ask you to consider a medical exam to rule out a physical reason your child having a problem. You may want to consider medication and we may suggest your consider this option, and we will discuss with you our reasons for this referral. You will be able to make to best decision for your child/adolescent.

What if our treatment options are not satisfactory or acceptable?

You may ask for a consultation or second opinion from another mental health professional, we will help you find a qualified person, and provide her/him with the information needed with your written permission.

What if counseling/therapy is not helping our child?

If we don't believe we are helping your child, as ethical counselors/therapists, we will refer you to another mental health professional. If you do not feel we are being helpful to your child, please let us know as soon as possible. We may change the type of approach used that may be more helpful or change to another professional. We cannot serve everyone and everyone may not be helped by our expertise. You and your child want to feel comfortable and confident in your counselor/therapist. We all have preference for those types of problems we enjoy helping or feel very adequate and those we do not prefer or do not feel adequate that we can help. We all have specialized training and expertise in some areas.

About Confidentiality and Coordinating Treatment

Privacy and Confidentiality are important aspects of counseling/therapy. We are guided by the federal HIPPA Act to ensure your medical information remains secure. Mental health records are medical information, therefore we must abide by these rules.

If you choose to have your insurance company pay for services, some information must be released to the insurance company. This includes the number of sessions and services provided, a diagnosis, and treatment goals and progress on those goals. The insurance company may request proof through documentation that services were performed. You will be asked to sign a release of information to provide this documentation to your insurance company. Refusal to do so could result in your insurance company not paying for the services. If that is the case, you would be financially responsible for payment of the services.

Children/adolescents need to feel they can share anything they need with a counselor/therapist. Any thought, feelings or behavior may need to be expressed without fear they will be criticized, judged or punished in any way. When they feel free to express themselves, they can cope with their most troubling issue/problem. This presents a problem when parents/legal guardians have access to their mental health information. If a child needs to keep a secret from a parent, it is usually not to hurt their feelings or upset them. They may be worried about sharing knowing their parent can ask to see their record at any time or find out about it at any time. We will talk about what will and will not be shared with a parent at the first session. We do inform the child and parent about the reason we must share information, usually when the safety of the child/parent is in jeopardy.

All information shared with us is kept in the strictest of confidence. It is your right that information about our sessions, and records is kept private. You will be asked to sign a release of information prior to any information about you or your child. I cannot reveal anyone is receiving services from me and I cannot share any information about what is told to me. Some staff at the Center may be students and/or under the supervision by licensed staff at this Center. They discuss all their cases with their site supervisor and graduate school professor. Counselors/therapists under supervision of another staff here discuss their cases with their supervisor only. You will sign a separate release of information and permission to share information if that is the case.

When do you and your Staff have to break confidentiality?

There are certain situations in which we are required by law to break confidentiality and the code of ethics in our particular profession. We are "mandatory reporters" for child abuse/neglect, danger to self/others, domestic violence and elder abuse.

What will happen if you have to report?

If we feel your child/adolescent is in danger of hurting themselves or others, we will certainly tell you and attempt to prevent it from occurring. We may have to involve the police or emergency services, we may ask you to take them to the nearest emergency room or psychiatric facility for an evaluation. We have to release only enough information to prevent the injury. You may be asked later to sign a release of information for further information to be released- i.e., a psychiatric facility.

If we have reason to believe or the child/adolescent reports child abuse or neglect, we are required to report this to the Kentucky Cabinet for Human Services, Department of Community-Based Services (DCBS), Child Protection Office or Child

Abuse Hotline. They may choose or not to investigate the incident. If we need to make a report, it is important to remember that it is our role to support your child/adolescent and you through this process. While we cannot interfere in the investigation, we recognize it is stressful to go through. We will be truthful in the investigation and we do not make a determination on whether or not any abuse/neglect has occurred. We want to be a resource and answer any questions we can during this stressful process.

If my child is involved in a civil or criminal case, do you have to release the record?

If you or your child/adolescent tells the Court that your child/adolescent is receiving services, they can subpoena their records. Please consult with your attorney about these issues.

If your child/adolescent was sent to us by the court for an evaluation or treatment, they expect a report. We will discuss our report with you and your child/adolescent. You must know if the Judge issues a subpoena for the records; we must give the Judge the records.

Can the Center staff consult with our psychiatrist, pediatrician or family doctor?

Yes, with written permission, we can coordinate mental health care between these medical professionals. Often medication management is done by the physician and counseling/therapy is performed by other mental health professionals.

Can the Center staff help my child/adolescent by consulting with school personnel?

Yes, with your written permission, we can consult with teachers, school administrators or daycare providers. Often we will speak with them in a team meeting, or even by email. We may share ideas to make your child's education more successful and suggest behavioral management strategies to help your child feel encouraged for positive behaviors. We may provide material about your child's mental health diagnosis to educate the school personnel. We have conducted educational trainings to school professionals about a variety of issues.

Other Questions about Privacy, Confidentiality and Financial Responsibility

Who do discuss our information with besides those already listed?

As counselors/therapists, we cannot know everything about every problem. Sometimes we consult with other mental health professionals on difficult cases. We do not use names or other identifying remarks. Other times, we may share interesting and challenging cases with those we supervise like student interns/supervisees. Some of us may ask to use your drawings, stories, or videos in a book, conference or training, but we have to get your permission first.

If we go on vacation, we may ask other counselor/therapist in the office to cover for us in case of emergencies. If we have to be gone for a long length of time, we may ask another counselor/therapist to meet with you (with your knowledge and permission) and so we will share information so they can help you.

If you would like to send your information to any other person, you will need to sign a release of information and tell us exactly what to send and by checking those types of information on the release form. The form is on our website, "Release of Information."

Sometime you may see us in public and yes, we do have to go grocery shopping! If we see you in public, we will not approach you or your family. This is because others may know we are counselors/therapists and then become aware you and your child/adolescent are in counseling; your privacy is important to us. Your child may recognize us and come up to us as a safe person, and that is alright. They may identify us as a family friend or even as their counselor. However, we will not discuss any personal counseling issues in public. We cannot attend any public or family gatherings, even if invited, in order to protect our counseling/therapeutic relationship and your privacy.

Financial Policy

Payment for professional services is expected at the time of service. We want to provide the best quality services to you and your family and you are responsible to see that we are paid for services to you and your family.

Many of our counselors/therapists accept insurance for services. If you are using your insurance coverage to pay for services, it is your responsibility to know if your insurance covers mental health, your deductible and co-pay amounts. You will want to ensure your counselor/therapist and/or their license is covered under your particular policy.

Insurance for mental health may NOT be the same company as your medical coverage! Please contact your insurance carrier and make sure you are covered prior to coming to the appointment. If not covered, you will be responsible for the non-negotiated rate.

In some instances, a deposit may be required to provide services for assessments, pro-bono services, and special programs. You are asked to sign an "Informed Consent and Permission for Treatment" Form. This form outlines your financial responsibility for services.

If for any reason your insurance or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or the agency/company/school responsible for funding services does not pay, you are legal responsible for services at the non-negotiated rate. We accept cash, checks, and credit/debit cards. Please ask your counselor/therapist who to make checks out to.

We will bill one insurance company on your behalf. If you have more than one insurance plan for your coverage, you may submit for reimbursement from the other insurance company.

We are only paid by insurance companies and other agencies when you received services from us. Our policy for "late cancel" and "no shows" are clear and based on standard medical policy. If you do not provide 24 hour notice to cancel an appointment, you will be expected to pay for the session(s) time as outlined in our "Informed Consent and Permission for Treatment" form.

If your financial state changes or insurance coverage stops, please let us know so we can make other arrangements with you. We do provide an income based sliding scale on a limited basis. We can negotiate our rate in these instances. If you think you cannot pay at the time of service, please let us know so we can come up with a solution. Parents who owe money and fail to make arrangements to pay for service may be referred to a collection company with added fees for collecting the balance owed.

If you and your former spouse have custody arrangements and each pays a portion of the visits, it is the responsibility of the person who signed the "Informed Consent and Permission for Treatment" form to ensure payment for services. We do not split bills to each parent; however, you may request a statement.

We do NOT send out monthly statements to our clients because payment is expected at the time of service. If you have a balance for some reason, it is expected that you pay the balance at the next appointment. You may request a statement at any time.

We do not call to remind our clients of their appointments due to confidentiality and privacy issues. We expect you to model responsible behavior for your child/adolescent. It shows that you have a commitment to yourself, them and your family.

So When You Want to Make an Appointment

Please call or email the counselor/therapist's number or email address listed on our website at www.yourkycounselor.com It is listed on the "Counselors" Page. We do not have a receptionist and are probably with a client. If you call, please leave your name, telephone number, and indicate you'd like to make an appointment on the voicemail. You may leave a brief description of the problem-- the age of child and major problem. You may email the counselor of your choice to schedule an appointment. We usually respond within twenty-four hours.

The First Session

Often we are asked if the parents need to come with or without the child/adolescent for the first session. It depends on the child/adolescent and their comfort with meeting with a stranger. We allow you to decide what the best is for you, and the child. You will be asked to print out and complete the "Intake for Child/Adolescent" and bring it with you to the first session. We will discuss the problems or difficulties you believe need to be addressed in counseling; begin to consider a preliminary diagnosis, if needed; begin to identify those services required to best treat your child/adolescent, and decide if you'd like to continue with services.

Parent Expectations for Your Child's Counselor/Therapist

As mental health professional, we use our knowledge, experience and skills to help you and your family. This includes following the ethical guidelines from our professional associations: American Counseling Association (ACA) and American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT).

What this means is that we are license and trained to practice only within the law that our profession allows. For example, we must practice mental health counseling, professional counseling or marriage and family therapy. We give you viewpoints from the perspective of the law, medicine, or any other profession.

We have to follow state law and the rules of our profession about confidential or private information. You can trust that anything you and your child/adolescent tell us in confidence will not be shared with anyone, except in situations explain earlier in the section, "About Confidentiality and Coordinating Treatment."

We cannot be a close friend or socialize with you or your child/adolescent. We cannot counsel children/adolescents who are friends of ours or our children/teens friends. We cannot have any type of business, sexual or intimate/romantic relationship with any client's parents. These restrictions are for you and your child's protection. These types of relationships or interactions can hinder his/her growth and development during counseling.

Emergency Contact

It may happen that you need to contact us and we are "in session." You may leave a message on our voicemail and we will return call as soon as possible. If you have a behavioral or emotional crisis, and you cannot contact us, you may call the local crisis line at 1-800-928-8000. You may contact your child's medical doctor, or take your child/adolescent to a local emergency room for an evaluation.

Complaints about Services

If you or your child/adolescent has a problem with their counselor, please talk to us about it. This is a relationship and problems may arise. If you are not satisfied with our work, please call or schedule a time to meet and discuss the issue when you child is not with you. We will make an effort to hear your complaint and try to solve the issue with you. If you feel we have broken a professional rule or treated you or your child unfairly, please talk to us about this. The best way to resolve any issue is to bring into the open and seek a solution. We certainly want to solve the problem so it does not become a bigger problem or hinder your child/adolescents growth and functioning.