

How to Choose your Child's Counselor

Most child victims of abuse benefit from a thorough mental health evaluation to determine his/her counseling needs. Abused children may or may not exhibit problem behaviors or signs of distress. A lack of those should not be the basis for deciding for or against counseling. A belief (actually a hope) of many caregivers is that the young child will forget about the abuse and, therefore, counseling is unnecessary. Some caregivers believe that counseling may even remind the child of memories that would normally fade away without intervention. The hope that memory of abuse will fade is common. However, some memories are stored through the senses and may not be cognitive (within the child's awareness).

Counselors treating young children often use a method known as play therapy. These specialists realize that young children communicate more easily through their play than through words. Play therapists use art, sand tray, etc. to provide opportunity for the child to bring forward unconscious conflicts in a safe environment. Counselors that work with children and youth include caregivers in setting goals and determining when milestones are met. Caregivers can also expect to receive education and support from the counselor in learning how to assist their child toward healing.

In addition, caregivers often benefit from meeting with a counselor of their own to focus on grief/trauma issues. The Liberty House Family Support Program also offers a caregiver information class that focuses on support and education to caregivers as they assist their child and themselves toward healing.

Children are amazingly resilient. If caregivers are able to meet their needs and give them support, they can heal and prosper. With your love and encouragement, and support from professionals, you and your child can recover from child abuse.

You know your child better than anyone else and you are the consumer. It is your funds or your insurance that will pay for the counselor's services. A good fit for you and your child really matters. It is helpful to meet alone with the counselor prior to him/her seeing your child. Plan ahead with questions or concerns so that you can ask them at the first meeting. Ask to see the playroom or the facility the counselor will be using. Continue with the counselor only if you think s/he is the right person to help your child.

Examples of questions to ask:

- Do you take private insurance? Am I covered to see you with my insurance policy? Do you accept Oregon Health Plan? Do you take a sliding fee if I must self-pay? Do you accept Crime Victims' Compensation?
- Are you licensed in the state of Oregon? What is your license? What is the phone number so I can check to assure you are in good standing with your licensing board?
- What kind of experience do you have treating children who have been sexually/physically abused/exposed to domestic violence, etc? Also ask about any additional special needs your child might have. For example: What experience do you have working with children who are hearing impaired? Developmentally delayed?
- What ages of children do you usually work with?

- How many years have you provided treatment to abused children?
- What are your methods and your approach to treating abused children?
- Do you have a special area of interest? Training? Expertise?
- How long will it take? How can you tell if my child is getting better?
- How will you involve me or us (the parents)? How about the rest of the family (like siblings)?
- Will you allow me an opportunity to express my concerns about my child without talking in front of my child?
- What if you and my child don't get along? What if we don't get along? What are the complaint procedures for you/your agency? How can I request another counselor if it seems like you are not a good fit?
- Have you had to testify in court? How many times? How do you feel about doing it, if it is necessary for the child?
- Can you see my child after school or in the early evening? (give times and days that are convenient for you)

Questions? Contact Liberty House Child Abuse Assessment Center, Family Support Services, 503-549-0288..