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Notes for Parents about Child Psychotherapy

Since the psychotherapy process may be new to you, and since certainly I'm new to you, I would like to answer some questions that many parents have raised to me over the course of their child's treatment.

What is Therapy?

Psychotherapy, as I see it, is a process of growth and change, with adults or with children. This growth or change occurs through awareness of one's self within the context of the therapist-client relationship. The therapist's role is one of observer/facilitator/consultant. The goal of therapy is to create the possibility for each person to be fully who they are, to be able to live at their full potential and bring into the world and into their relationships all of their gifts.

How Often? For How Long? Who?

The frequency of visits, which members of the family will be seen and how long the treatment will continue are all based on the particular needs of your child and family and on my schedule. What follows are some general guidelines and rules of thumb.

First of all, for us to develop a working relationship it's essential that our work together be consistent. I usually see clients once weekly. Since young children have a different concept of time than we do as adults, it's especially important that their appointments be consistent and regular. Sometimes I may recommend that parents bring their children to see me more than once a week either because of the symptoms their children are experiencing or because of how the child is working during the therapy hour. Sometimes I see children less frequently than once a week, this especially may happen during the termination phase of our work.

The length of treatment needed varies from a few weeks to a few years. I really can't tell you at the beginning how long the treatment should continue because the length of treatment needed depends so much on you, your participation, your child and your child's style of growth. I can give you a very general idea based on my past experience with similar problems, but you and your child are unique individuals and I can't know when the work will feel finished to you. The time to stop will come when you and your child agree that you have accomplished what you set out to do and that you don't want to continue any longer. I will also be watching for signs that the work is completed by looking at how the child is doing at home, in school, and with friends and by looking at the intensity of the work during the therapy session.

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I have found that the most progress occurs when the parents have been actively involved in the therapy. I may ask you to see me on a regular basis without your child or we might arrange regular family therapy appointments in addition to or instead of your child's individual appointment. Sometimes I might ask you to participate in the child's session as an observer or as a partner in the child's work. I would like you to let me know if anything significant is happening with your child or your family. I have found that the best time to tell me these things is usually at the beginning of your child's session.

What Do I Look For During The Diagnostic Evaluation?

I begin my work with a child by interviewing the child and parents together. We'll talk about both of your observations and reasons for concern. If the child is willing to explore further with me then I will continue with a four to five week evaluative period. During this period I will meet with the child individually three to four times and also take a social and developmental history of the child from the you.

During this evaluative period I will be looking at the following areas: perceptive and contacting skills, spontaneity, body image and use of the physical self, humor, defenses, expression of emotions, mood, cognitive abilities, creativity, sense of self-esteem, social skills, manner of interacting with me and the environment, and response to treatment. I will be getting to know your child and becoming familiar with your family.

After that initial evaluative period I will meet again with the you and your child to share my observations and recommendations, as well as to hear your feedback about this therapy experience. Then we'll decide together how to proceed.

What Goes On During the Course of Treatment?

In the beginning when I meet individually with your child I may ask you to wait in the waiting room. When dealing with anxiety-provoking material children sometimes need the sense of security gained by being able to check in the waiting room to be sure that their parents are there and are okay. Later you may feel free to leave and use the forty-five minutes for yourself. Please be sure to be back on time to meet your child when he/she finishes. Sometimes it's difficult for children to leave my office and it's always easier if they have the parent to go to.

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I use several media to facilitate the child's self-expression. We might draw, use puppets or dolls, or paint, or work with clay or build a scene in the sand. We might play with board games. Your child should wear casual, comfortable clothing.

Psychotherapy is a process. Your child will be becoming more aware of her/himself. Some of the things that your child becomes aware of may cause her/him to feel more distressed, just as you might become distressed when you discover parts of yourself that you don't like or that don't work the way you want them to. Your child might become more difficult to get along with at times during the therapy. Remember that all of this is part of the process of self-discovery and reintegration, not necessarily the end result. Please keep me informed about these changes. Be prepared that you may undergo some reintegration yourself.

Confidentiality

I will respect the confidentiality of your child's work so I won't give you any specific information about what your child has said or done in the sessions without your child's permission. Also, so that your child will feel free to use the time to work on whatever he/she wishes and won't feel obligated to do something which you will be pleased with, please don't ask your child for a report of the session.

I will always inform you if you or your child is in any danger and I do comply with all child abuse reporting laws. I will encourage your child to share with you, or allow me to share with you, what they are experiencing internally. I see one of my jobs as helping to facilitate contact within the family.

I would like any feedback about the therapy sessions or about your child's behavior immediately following the sessions. It's my policy to include your child in the room when you share things with me before your child's appointment. I don't like to ask a child to sit in the waiting room, wondering what their parent(s) and I are discussing. Also, I like children to know what information I have about them. If you want to see me alone I'll ask you to arrange a separate appointment.

I don't expect these comments to be all inclusive nor to answer all of your questions. I just hope that they make it easier for you to become acquainted with the therapeutic process. I hope that our work together will provide a healing experience for your family.

*Sincerely,
Christiane*