

Children's Center

A place where healing begins

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 problem behaviors should not be the basis for deciding for or against counseling. A belief (actually a hope) of many caregivers is that their child will forget about the abuse and, therefore, counseling is unnecessary. Some caregivers believe that counseling may even remind their 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), with the possibility of causing problems in the future.

Counselors treating young children use a variety of methods to assist children in bringing worries, false beliefs, and traumatic events to the surface in a safe environment. Counselors that work with children and youth usually include caregivers when 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 Children's Center Family Support Program also offers caregiver workshops that focus on support and education to caregivers as they assist their child and themselves toward healing. Call 503-655-7725 to request the workshop schedule and registration information.

Children are amazingly resilient. If caregivers are able to meet their needs and give them support, children can heal and prosper. With your love and encouragement, and support from professionals when needed, 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 that you can ask the first time you meet. Continue with the counselor only if you think s/he is the right person to help your child.

Examples of questions to ask

Am I covered to see you with my insurance policy? Do you take private insurance? Do you accept Oregon Health Plan? Do you take a sliding fee if I must self-pay? Do you accept Crime Victims' Compensation? Other questions might include:

- 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?

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- 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 have experience working with?
- How many years have you provided counseling to abused children?
- What are your methods and your approach to counseling 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?
- Can you see my child after school or in the early evening? (give times and days that are convenient for you)