



Policy on Working with Separated or Separating Parents

Purpose:

To provide clear guidelines for therapists at Grow Paediatric Therapy when working with families where parents are separated, in the process of separating, or experiencing custody disputes. This policy is designed to ensure compliance with South Australian laws, uphold ethical standards, and prioritize the best interests of the child.

1. Guiding Principles

Child-Centred Approach: The primary focus of therapy is the well-being and therapeutic needs of the child. All actions and decisions must prioritize the child's best interests.

Equal Parental Rights: In the absence of a court order, both parents have equal rights regarding decisions about their child's welfare, including participation in therapy. Reasonable efforts must be made to inform and involve both parents in the therapeutic process.

Confidentiality: All information disclosed during therapy sessions is confidential. Records and details of the therapeutic process will not be shared with either parent without the explicit consent of the other, unless required by law or court order.

2. Initial Intake and Consent

Consent to Therapy: Consent for therapy should ideally be obtained from both parents. If consent is obtained from only one parent, the therapist must assess the appropriateness of commencing therapy and document the decision-making process.

Communication with Both Parents: At the initial intake, therapists should clarify the involvement of both parents. Where possible, therapists should offer to meet or communicate with the non-referring parent to explain the therapy process and discuss any concerns.

Intake Forms: Intake forms should be completed by the parent initiating therapy. If the non-referring parent requests to provide additional information or complete a separate intake form, this should be accommodated to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the child's needs.

3. Handling Requests for Information

Progress Reports and Session Notes: Progress reports are produced on an as-needed basis or upon a reasonable request by either parent. No detailed session notes or specific information about therapy content will be provided without explicit consent from both parents, unless legally mandated.

Requests for Confidential Information: If a parent requests confidential information (e.g., session notes or specific details of what the child has shared in therapy), the therapist must decline to provide such information unless there is a court order or legal requirement to do so.

Court Orders and Legal Documents: Therapists must request a copy of any relevant court orders that specify the rights and responsibilities of each parent regarding the child's therapy. These documents must be reviewed carefully to ensure compliance with legal obligations.

4. Managing Parental Conflict

Neutral Stance: Therapists must maintain a neutral and impartial stance in situations of parental conflict. The focus should remain on the child's therapeutic needs, without taking sides or becoming involved in disputes between parents.

Communication: All communication with parents should be professional, clear, and focused on the child's needs and progress. Therapists should avoid sharing personal opinions or engaging in discussions that may exacerbate parental conflict.

Referrals and Termination of Services: If parental conflict significantly disrupts the therapeutic process or places the child at risk, the therapist may consider referring the family to another service or terminating therapy. Such decisions must be made in consultation with a supervisor and documented thoroughly.

5. Legal and Ethical Considerations

Compliance with South Australian Laws: Therapists must adhere to all relevant laws in South Australia, including those related to child protection, family law, and privacy.

Professional Ethics: Therapists are expected to follow the ethical guidelines of their professional associations, such as the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), the Australian Psychological Society (APS), or the Australian Counselling Association (ACA).

Mandatory Reporting: If there are concerns about the child's safety or well-being, therapists have a legal obligation to report these concerns to the appropriate authorities as mandated by South Australian child protection laws.

6. Documentation and Record Keeping

Thorough Documentation: Therapists must document all interactions with parents, including consent, discussions about therapy, requests for information, and any decisions made regarding the child's therapy.

Secure Record Keeping: All records must be securely stored in accordance with privacy laws and Grow Paediatric Therapy's policies on data protection.

7. Review and Supervision

Ongoing Supervision: Therapists should regularly consult with supervisors regarding cases involving separated or separating parents to ensure that all actions taken are in line with this policy and best practice standards.

Policy Review: This policy will be reviewed annually or as needed to ensure compliance with changes in legislation, ethical standards, or clinical practice guidelines.