



Help!

A guide to psychotherapy for children

with a note for parents and carers

Bad feelings

Sometimes life can be tough.
Feelings can be difficult.

Everyone has worries, but sometimes you can feel
they're just too much!

Sometimes you feel angry.
Sometimes you feel sad.
Sometimes you feel like nobody likes you.
Sometimes you don't like anybody either!
Maybe you even hate people!

You might feel you have no friends.
You could be in lots of trouble at school.
You might have had lots of changes in your life,
too many to manage.

Sometimes you're really, really worried.
It might even feel like you've got a war going on
inside you.
Sometimes you may find it hard to get to sleep.
You might even have scary dreams.

Sometimes you feel like a really bad person.
You feel like you're on your own,
and no-one understands.

Can anyone help?

You may need someone who:
can understand how hard things can be when
you're growing up.
can help children and teenagers with some of
the struggles life throws at them.

A person called a child psychotherapist works
with lots of children and young people,
listens carefully, thinks a lot, and together with
each person, can help make life make more
sense, so that he or she can begin to feel better.

This person would see you, at the same time
each week, in the same room,
to do the same work.
It's not school work, but work about feelings
and how to handle them.
There are feelings you already know about,
and maybe some other feelings
you didn't even know you had.

This would be private, although there would
also be meetings with your parents and carers
to see how you're getting on.

What happens next?

Some meetings will be set up -
the adults will do this.

You and your parents or carers, or other people
who are thinking about you, and are often also
very unhappy that you are unhappy,
will meet with the therapist, to try to work out
what's going on right now.

What do you think is hard?
What do they think is hard?
Maybe nobody really knows
what to do.

The therapist will also meet a few times just
with you, to see if this way of working
is good for you,
feels OK, interesting, worth trying -
even a bit of an adventure.

You might play with toys, if you feel like it,
or draw, and talk, or be quiet.

The therapist will keep thinking about what's
happening, and try to help you sort things out.

Your sessions

If everyone agrees, then some sessions will be set up. You might hear this called 'treatment': but this isn't like going to the doctor's, though it's got the same name. You will meet with your therapist each week, maybe even more than once a week.

You'll start doing all those things, playing with toys, or sand, or water, or drawing, or painting, sometimes being messy, sometimes being angry, sometimes being sad.

Sometimes you might hardly be able to wait for your sessions so you can carry on playing and thinking.

Then sometimes you might be angry with your therapist, and you might not want to go to your session. That's when the adults will need to help you carry on doing this brave thing.

Because it IS brave to think about problems.

It is good to talk - and feel, and think, with someone who's there to think with you, so that things don't get stuck in your mind.

So how long would I do this for?

This isn't magic and it isn't very quick, although you might feel quite a bit better quite soon, even after one or two sessions.

But perhaps those problems took a long time to grow, and may take some time to change.

It's important to make sure that changes stay changed.

The grownups may need to change too, so they usually see someone as well.

Along the way there will be reviews where your therapist and the grownups who look after you can think together about how you're getting on.

Of course you too will be asked what you think - this is after all your life we're talking about.

Afterwards

So what happens when this treatment stops? Well, you will hopefully feel quite a lot better. Things may well have changed, at home, and at school, because things will have been sorted out from all those muddles you had in your mind. So there'll be room for something new.

After you've stopped seeing your therapist, things usually go on changing and improving.

How do we know?

Because people called researchers have studied this, and talked to children and the adults that look after them, after the sessions have finished. What these researchers found out was that the thinking goes on being helpful, even after the sessions have stopped.

You still have the memory of your therapy and your therapist inside your mind. Even if you might forget a lot of it, you will remember quite a lot too.

It doesn't go away.

You may even ask for a 'top-up' later.

A note to parents and carers

Child psychotherapy is not just about clearing up symptoms, but is concerned with overall long-term development. What sort of person will your child grow up to be?

Once your child is in treatment, the therapist would contact other professionals if needed, usually with permission, so that we can be assured that your child is getting the best possible attention for all the mix of troubles inside his or her mind, and so those dealing with him or her in different capacities have an understanding of how we can all work together. Often work with parents and carers is part of what is offered, and there will be regular meetings to see how things are progressing. The child's sessions remain confidential except where there are expressed concerns or dangers, when parents and other agencies where appropriate would be included in the shared confidential thinking.

You can get into the process by referring the child via your GP, or the school, or directly, depending on the area in which you live. More information is available on the website of the Association of Child Psychotherapists at www.childpsychotherapy.org.uk

Published by The Harris Meltzer Trust for The Association of Child Psychotherapists

Text: © Judith Edwards

Illustration: © Eleanor Percival

Design: www.bournestudios.co.uk

www.harris-meltzer-trust.org.uk

