

Agreement for Parents

Psychotherapy can be a very important resource for children of separation and divorce. Establishing a therapeutic alliance outside of the home can:

- Facilitate open and appropriate expression of the strong feelings which routinely accompany family transitions, including guilt, grief, sadness and anger.
- Provide an emotionally neutral setting in which children can explore these feelings.
- Help children understand and accept the new family composition and the plans for contact with each member of the family.
- Offer feedback and recommendations to a child's caregivers based on knowledge of the child's specific emotional needs and developmental capacities.

However, the usefulness of such therapy is extremely limited when the therapy itself becomes simply another matter of dispute between parents. With this in mind, and in order to best help your child, I strongly recommend that each of the child's caregivers (e.g., parents, stepparents, daycare workers, guardian ad litem [GAL], etc.) mutually accept the following as requisites for the child's participation in therapy.

1. As your child's psychotherapist, it is my primary responsibility to respond to your child's emotional needs. This includes, but is not limited to, contact with your child and each of his or her caregivers, and gathering information relevant to understanding your child's welfare and circumstances as perceived by important others (e.g., pediatrician, teachers, other psychologists, social workers, etc.). In some cases, this may include a recommendation that you consult with a physician, should matters of your child's physical health be relevant to this therapy.

2. I ask that all caregivers remain in frequent communication regarding this child's welfare and emotional well-being. Open communication about his or her emotional state and behavior is critical. In this regard, I invite each of you to initiate frequent and open exchange with me as your child's therapist.

3. I ask that all parties recognize and, as necessary, reaffirm to the child, that I am the child's helper and not allied with any disputing party.

4. I strongly recommend that all caregivers involved choose to participate in psychoeducational groups in which separating and divorced parents learn basic strategies for conducting a divorce in the best interests of the child. I can refer you to such programs.

5. Please be advised regarding the limits of confidentiality as it applies to psychotherapy with a child in these circumstances:

- I keep records of all contacts relevant to your child's well-being. These records are subject to court sub-poena and may, under some circumstances, be solicited by parties to your divorce, including your attorneys.
- Any matter brought to my attention by either parent regarding the child may be revealed to the other parent. Matters which are brought to my attention that are irrelevant to the child's welfare may be kept in confidence. However, these matters may best be brought to the attention of others, such as attorneys, personal therapists or counselors.

*** I am legally obligated to bring any concern regarding the child's health and safety to the attention of relevant authorities. When possible, should this necessity arise, I will advise all parties regarding my concerns.**

6. This psychotherapy will not yield recommendations about custody. In general, I recommend that parties who are disputing custody strongly consider participation in alternative forms of negotiation and conflict resolution, including mediation and custody evaluation, rather than try to settle a custody dispute in court.