

TEENAGERS AND THERAPY

Is therapy with teenagers different from therapy with adults and younger children. The short answer is YES.

According to a post by Dr Janette Sasson Edgette, Many of the teenagers professionals see have not asked to be in therapy (although that is changing in the wake of the youth mental health movement). They were brought by parents or other caregivers or sent there by their school or the courts making the therapy, at least in the beginning, non-consensual. This changes almost everything about it, drawing into play issues of power, respect, and implicit communication that profoundly affect the relationship between therapist and teen, as well as the course and outcome of therapy. Did your graduate/training program pay a lot of attention to this? Mine didn't; I learned on the fly.

As a result, the relationship dynamic is different with teenagers than it is with adults. Teens are experts at discerning adults' vulnerabilities and anxieties and, if they choose, will exploit them like no one's business. All those things we hope to be in session — helpful, trustworthy, competent, credible — are exactly what we might feel stripped of. For example, those therapists to whom it's important to appear in control of the session will find themselves struggling to keep any semblance of that. Those who try to hide their anxiety about not knowing what to say are rendered speechless in no time flat. And those who try to meet all the wishes of the teenager in an attempt to establish a rapport find that the conditions they've agreed to simply wind up compromising the integrity of the therapy to begin with.

Therapists working with teenagers need to be able to maintain an even perspective in the face of extraordinary stories, affects, and dynamics, all while responding authentically and emotionally and at the same time demonstrating thoughtfulness and self-restraint. This is difficult, and some clinicians are better suited for it than others

Working with teenagers requires a unique set of communication skills, such as a fluency in nonverbal communication and a personal comfort with mosaic, rather than linear, communication patterns. Again, not all therapists are comfortable with this type of **"language"**.

Therapists working with teens need a working knowledge of the social culture in which these kids are growing up. It's less about knowing the current music or fashion scene than it is about knowing what it's like to be a teenager in these times, with the pressures that lead to almost paralyzing levels of anxiety for some and despairingly low moods for others. And please don't ever say that you were a teenager once too. It really is a whole different world. So much has changed in the past decade plus, and it's changed in ways that have altered the DNA of how kids communicate with one another, stay connected or don't, relate with family members, acquire information about the world, and plan for their futures, among many other things.

Dr Sasson Edgette has a book that goes into detail regarding the process of therapy with the young adolescent: **"Therapeutic Conversations with Adolescents: Helping Teens in Therapy Thrive in an Ultra-Competitive, Screen-Saturated World"**.

PROCESS FOR TEEN THERAPY



Teenagers have a hard time juggling so many demands in the world of today. They navigate their environment, friends, hobbies, adults a lot differently in this day and age. Communication, interaction and socialization is different. Demands are different. Sometimes this creates overwhelming anxiety as they try to establish their personal identity while still being part of several group identities. They have to deal with changing moods and body changes which can be exacerbated from the above. As a result we see a lot more teenagers advocate for themselves and ask “mom/dad I would like to see someone”. Teenagers are a lot more aware of their mental health and want support to take care of it.

The process with teenagers is slightly different to that of therapy with an adult or child. They are able to convey on their own what they are experiencing. So with teenagers I rarely conduct the intake appointment with the parent first. Having the first session with your teenager allows them to feel heard and understood and that their feelings are validated. They then trust the process is for them and not a simple collusion between parent and professional.



What to expect

1. An appointment will be made for your teenager at a convenient time for them and yourself. Talk to Charlene if you need a specific time to accommodate sport or outside curricular activity. Therapy should not get in the way of what brings your son/daughter enjoyment and fulfillment. Charlene will try her best to accommodate. Thereafter we will organize a weekly appointment they can attend.
2. The first session can be very awkward, silent and weird. These are all normal experiences. It takes time for any rapport to be established but this is a safe space and yours to navigate in the way you feel comfortable.
3. Confidentiality is a vital part of the process and I can reassure you that everything you say stays between you and me your therapist: However there are conditions that are governed by law and confidentiality can be broken in the following incidences
 - If you are a danger to yourself or others then there is a duty to disclose and get you the help you need.
 - If someone has hurt you or is hurting you then I have a duty to disclose and report any incident that can be classified as abusive or harmful to you.
 - If a court of law compels me to report on your condition and care.

Should any concern arise then this will be discussed with you first and thereafter with your parents.

3. The number of sessions cannot be determined from the onset. As we work through what brought you to therapy we will constantly assess how you are progressing and if therapy frequency needs to be adjusted.
4. The need for feedback with your parents is determined by you. However if they are a contributing factor to how you feel then we cannot expect things to change if we don't communicate with mom and dad. We will discuss what is ok to feedback and what you want to keep to our therapy sessions. But it can be very helpful to include your parents. Openly discuss anything that makes you feel uncomfortable about the feedback and we will try find a solution together.